

Bust the union busters!



Ben Searcy/AFR



AAP Image/Jono Searle

Above: Union busters ACTU secretary Sellout Sally McManus and Prime Minister Anthony Albanese. Right: Protesting workers calling a spade a spade. Sign brands Sally McThatcher's forehead with "Union Buster."

Chuck the bosses' lackeys out of the ALP/ACTU!

The Labor government's state takeover of the CFMEU, with the support of their ACTU cronies, is one of the biggest attacks against the working class in generations and a craven expression of the ALP/ACTU tops openly battling for the bosses. Many workers have rightly reacted in outrage at this massive betrayal by a so-called "Labor" government, the latest in a string of attacks against the oppressed under Albanese, from backing the genocide in Palestine to turning the screws on the working class at home. With Albanese's hold on power already tenuous, and substantial sections of the workers movement looking to "bury Labor," the ALP/ACTU leadership is in the weakest position it has been for decades. For those looking for recourse we say: ***Bust the union busters! Fight to oust Albanese, Sellout Sally & co. from the ALP/ACTU!***

While the Labor tops engage in tough talk and faux nonchalance from the halls of power, there has been deep reverberations within the unions and the Labor Party itself over the attack on the CFMEU. Work-

ers must take advantage of this and hound these open lackeys for the bosses out of the labour movement. The fact is, you cannot defend the CFMEU, let alone the working class as a whole, if you are in league with those who are meting out the bosses' measures. Chucking Albo & co out is an elementary step forwards in the struggle not just to defeat the administrator but to launch a broader working-class fightback against eroding living conditions.

Instead, the "left" union leaders have been doing anything but. CFMEU national secretary Zach Smith is a prime example. In the lead-up to administration, instead of mobilising the union he led, Smith attempted to play footsy with the very forces in Labor and "Fair Work" pushing through the takeover, while imposing his own takeover of the Victorian branch. After his schemes fell through he was rewarded for his efforts of conciliation, kept on as chief water boy for the new commandant Mark Irving KC and remaining a member of the ALP national executive. Today he continues his attempts to keep a foot in

both camps, in his words to "get us out of administration as quickly as possible" not through a class-struggle fight but with due compliance. His left Laborite mates (from the CFMEU "leadership-in-exile" to the union tops of the ETU, MUA, et al.) rather than dismissing Smith as the administrator's stooge that he is, champion him as one of the leaders of the "resistance" to administration.

In fact, they all share the very same program and strategy: to not confront the ALP/ACTU union-busting swine head-on but to convince them to change tack. Take for instance the Line in the Sand campaign, which promises not to defeat the administration but to "support the CFMEU" during it, trying to "lock in" union EBAs and keep delegates from being sacked. But waging the class-struggle fight necessary for this requires breaking the binds that tie the unions they lead to Albanese, the bosses he bats for and their administration. Instead of breaking from this unity, the campaign has sought to avoid the Labor government's ire, resorting to a

couple of one-day demos with grand declarations to "bury Labor" by "punishing them" through the ballot box. The fact that their "line in the sand" has been continually crossed, with union reps dumped and CFMEU EBAs withering on the vine, has provoked nothing further from these union "leaders." Purged CFMEU Queensland Secretary Ravbar's "Your Union Your Choice" mirrors this ducking and weaving, preaching reliance on prolonged legal battles in the bosses' courts. The chances of any success in the High Court is close to none, with Victorian ETU leader Troy Gray admitting that the case is unlikely to get a full hearing for months by which time Dutton may well be at the helm.

The much touted Trade Unions for Democracy summit is cut from the same cloth, with the added threat of splitting the ACTU. With their working-class base keen to fight the union busters leading the ALP/ACTU, "left" union leaders were pressured into talk of a potential "blue-collar union federation." But such a move

continued on page 17

Australia at a crossroads

Our last issue of *Red Battler*, representing a programmatic refounding of the SL/A, rooted Australia in the context of a US-led world order. In it, we showed how in spite of the ruling class's rhetoric about being able to avoid the trouble overseas, Australian capitalism is tied to the fortunes of a now-declining US hegemony and thus is heading towards the same essential crisis as the rest of the world. We posed the question: will the ruling class succeed in dragging the proletariat down with the American Empire, or will the proletariat resolve the coming crisis in its favour? The latter path

is completely contingent on breaking the workers movement from its current pro-capitalist leadership who have delivered defeat after defeat.

The past few months have made this all the more acute. Working-class anger is real, but at each juncture it has been held back by a leadership incapable of taking on the ruling class and their Labor government. Instead, the position of the working class to launch a fightback has taken serious blows. The CFMEU being put into administration is one of the most significant attacks on the workers movement in generations. The pro-Palestine movement,

which once mobilised tens of thousands, has lost momentum. As for most of the left, in these increasingly uncertain times they have shown themselves increasingly impotent and sidelined from the ongoing struggles. The workers movement has continued to be tied to the Labor government, discrediting itself as an independent force capable of challenging the status quo—including in the eyes of substantial sections of the working class itself. As a result, instead of moving in a progressive direction, discontent at a decaying social order has increasingly drifted rightwards. The re-election of Donald Trump in the

US has both confirmed and compounded these trends.

That being said, this course is not inevitable. In spite of the deteriorating position of Australian capitalism, the Labor government has been able to continue to contain social unrest. As a result Labor, although quite weak, has clung onto power. But this hold is tenuous. Today, Australia stands at a crossroads. Either the working class will enter the scene as an independent force and strike a blow against the government or the workers movement will continue to be

continued on page 8

Defend Palestinian and anti-war protesters!

The following PDC statement was published on 5 October. Members of socialist groups are among the more than 100 activists facing charges. Many have been arrested in home raids by police. In November and January some 64 activists faced Melbourne Magistrates Court, with most cases adjourned to January, February or March.

The brutal police assault on Disrupt Land Forces (DLF) protesters on 11 September, and spate of arrests which accompanied it, is an attack on all opponents of Australian militarism and defenders of Palestine. Over three days, scores were arrested, with further raids and arrests ongoing. Almost 100 people have been charged. Now, in a wave of threatened

state repression, opponents of the Israeli attack on Lebanon are being targeted. Already one protester is facing a year in jail for carrying a Hezbollah flag. **Drop all charges against DLF protesters! Drop all charges against victims of the Zionist witchhunt! Defend all opponents of the genocide in Gaza!**

The Victorian Labor government allocated police an estimated \$30 million to suppress the protests, imposing a “ring of steel” protecting the professional merchants of death at the Land Forces weapons expo. In the biggest police operation in 24 years anyone within a designated area was subject to extraordinary anti-terror laws and extreme violence by the bosses’ thugs in blue. Echoing

the description Zionists use to justify their slaughter of Palestinians, the secretary of The Police Association Victoria labelled protesters “dirty, filthy, disgusting animals.”

While the intent of DLF protesters is laudable, small-scale actions facing down state repression cannot stop Australia’s military build-up and support to the slaughter in Gaza. The power to do that lies with the unions, which have the capacity to shut down Australia’s war industry and black ban military goods to Israel. Making this happen would require a determined struggle against the Laborite union bureaucracy, including those who declare their support to Palestine while not lifting a finger to

mobilise their base.

Regardless of political differences, united-front action in defence of these pro-Palestine protesters is urgently necessary—mobilising the combined forces of the workers movement, the left, and all supporters of Palestine. The Partisan Defence Committee (PDC) has contributed \$100 towards the legal costs of those DLF activists facing charges. We urge others to contribute at chuffed.org/project/113528-disrupt-land-forces-legal-costs and to contact the PDC to organise co-ordinated actions in defence of DLF protesters and other supporters of Palestine.

Nigerian protesters face death penalty

From Lagos to Melbourne, Mexico City to Hamburg, London to New York, on 7 and 8 November protesters rallied in cities around the world to denounce the repression of #EndBadGovernance protesters in Nigeria. The Partisan Defence Committees and ICL sections mobilised for these protests, including working together with supporters of International Socialist Alternative, the Committee for a Workers’ International and other left groups. In Melbourne approximately 70 people mobilised following endorsements from numerous organisations including the Black Peo-

ples Union, Revolutionary Communist Organisation, and the Victorian and Sydney branches of the Maritime Union of Australia.

As the protests were being held, the Nigerian government postponed the 8 November trial of eleven. These activists, including socialists and trade unionists, continue to face the death penalty on trumped-up “treason” charges. We must mobilise broader forces and continue to up the pressure on the Nigerian government, including with demonstrations, publicity and union protest letters! We reprint below a PDC call for the

internationally coordinated united-front defence campaign, originally published on 16 October.

* * *

The left and trade-union movement must take action in defense of Nigerian activists. Nearly 2,500 people were arrested in August for participating in #EndBadGovernance protests against the starvation policies of the Bola Tinubu government. More than 40 were shot dead by security forces, and many of those arrested still languish in jail. Ominously, eleven face the death penalty on trumped-up treason charges. Their trial is set to start November 8 [subsequently postponed]. **Drop the charges now! Release all arrested protesters!**

Protesters facing treason charges

Inspired by the youthful uprising in Kenya in July, the protesters in Nigeria demanded an end to devastating economic austerity. To pay off debt imposed by the World Bank, IMF and African Development Bank, the Nigerian government last year abolished fuel subsidies and devalued the currency, leading to a dramatic spike in the cost of food, transportation and other necessities. The subsidies were a lifeline for many Nigerians in a country with almost no public transportation infrastructure. Coupled with soaring inflation, the austerity measures have pushed many more millions into starvation.

The Tinubu regime’s brutal repression

targeted protest leaders with the most draconian penalties. Socialist activists from the Youth Rights Campaign and the Solidarity Network for Workers’ Rights are among those now facing the death penalty. Tortured in jail, some were released on harsh bail conditions.

Showing that this crackdown is aimed at the entire working-class movement, the government detained Nigeria Labour Congress president Joe Ajaero as he was on his way to attend the September Trades Union Congress in Britain. The Tinubu regime has also outrageously charged Andrew Wynne (also known as Drew Povey), who for years has run a pro-labor bookshop located in the headquarters of the NLC, with seeking to overthrow the government. While Wynne was not in the country at the time, police raided the bookshop and arrested his assistant Adeyemi Abayomi, one of those facing a possible death sentence.

ACT NOW!

- **Publicise the case far and wide on social media, union newsletters and newspapers. Break the blackout of news about the repression.**
- **Get your union to protest this outrage. Letters such as the one by ILWU Local 10 are a good start.**
- **Donate to the PDC.**
- **Organize demonstrations and protests around the world. Contact the PDC to coordinate our efforts at partisandefense@earthlink.net**

Free all the Kanak militants now!

The following 1 November statement by the Comité de défense sociale was published in Le Bolchévik No.237, newspaper of the Ligue trotskyste de France.

Since the youth-centred Kanak revolt against the reform of the electoral body broke out in May, a reform which would make the Kanak a minority in their own country, about fifteen militants have been killed by French cops and loyalist militias, and hundreds have been imprisoned. Seven of them have been transported to metropolitan France, where they remain in prison 17,000 km from home and families.

The struggle of the Kanak people for liberation from the colonial yoke is in the interests of all French workers and those in the other colonies of decrepit French imperialism. Each blow struck against the French imperialists in Kanaky would reinforce the position of the French working class to fight for better working and living conditions. Each blow struck by the Kanak against our exploiters aids the struggle of the French Muslim minority against the conditions of oppression and segregation they endure, as well as the struggle of the Martinican masses who are fighting today against the high cost of living and racist oppression. A free and socialist Kanaky would give an immense impulse to class struggle in France and to the struggle of the masses of the Antilles, whose fight to realise true liberation must also lead to independence and socialism.

Solidarity with the Kanak people must not remain at the level of fine words—it must be made concrete! The Committee for Social Defence calls on union militants, the left and anti-racist youth to contribute financially to the defence of the imprisoned Kanak militants!

Every dollar counts! Send your donations to the CDDS!

By bank transfer

IBAN: FR57 2004 1000 0101 4292 5J02 089

BIC: PSSTFRPPPAR

RED BATTLER

Marxist newspaper of the Central Committee of the Spartacist League of Australia, section of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist).

EDITOR: O. Dziga

MANAGING EDITOR: C. Cunningham

PRODUCTION MANAGER: R. Neuer

CIRCULATION MANAGER: Mike Wallace

Published by Spartacist ANZ Publishing Co., PO Box 967, North Melbourne Vic 3051.

E-mail: redbattler@exemail.com.au Subscriptions: \$10 for 4 issues; International: \$15

Opinions expressed in signed articles and letters do not necessarily express the editorial viewpoint.

Printed by trade-union labour.

Printed by Kosdown Printing, 10 Rocklea Dr., Port Melbourne Vic 3207.

ISSN: 2982-0448

No. 2, Summer 2024/25

Date of Issue: 25 January 2025

Pröbsting appeal denied

The following statement was initially published in Workers Hammer No. 254, newspaper of the Spartacist League/Britain, on 5 September. Protests in defence of Michael Pröbsting have been held in Melbourne and cities around the world.

The 6-month suspended sentence for Michael Pröbsting, leader of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency, was upheld by the court in Vienna at a 21 August appeal hearing. This means that at any time he can be thrown in prison at the state’s whim. Michael’s conviction in May for the RCIT’s staunch defence of the Palestinian people sets a sinister precedent for increasing repression of pro-Palestinian activists throughout Western Europe. It is urgently necessary to unite in defence of the RCIT and all opponents of the genocide in Gaza facing similar prosecution.

The PDC is a class-struggle, non-sectarian defence organisation, championing causes in the interest of the working class, associated with the Spartacist League of Australia.



Contact the Partisan Defence Committee at pd.c.melbourne@exemail.com.au

How Hawke and Keating beat the left



National Archives of Australia



Ruth Maddison

Above: Canberra, 1983, Hawke and Keating forging their deal with the devil at the national summit of the first Accord. Right: Melbourne, 1987, builders labourers protesting the Labor government's union busting.

The following article by SLA Central Committee member, C. Cunningham is based on discussions resulting from the 2024 SLA and B-L Fusion Conference. It follows the document "How the Whitlam government paved the way for neoliberalism," published in Red Battler No. 1.

The reality confronting the Whitlam, Fraser and later Hawke/Keating governments was that Australia's highly protected and outdated industrial base (what Keating would later call Australia's "industrial museum"), having been hit by a series of external shocks, was internationally unviable and uncompetitive. By the early 1980s Australia had faced a decade of recessions. Industries were failing, inflation was high, bankruptcies and unemployment were on the increase. This was given extra gravitas as governments around the world, most notably Thatcher's Britain and Reagan's United States, had already begun to implement neoliberal economic "shock therapy" to maximise international competitiveness by reducing costs and increasing productivity through savage attacks on the organised working class. If nothing changed, Australian capitalism would be left in the mud and its people would become, as Singapore's then PM Lee Kuan Yew put it, the "poor white trash of Asia." Australia's capitalist rulers had to urgently deregulate and modernise the economy.

But the route for the Australian ruling class to push through neoliberal reforms on the model of Reagan and Thatcher would not be easy. Firstly, there was a deeply entrenched, centralised wage indexation system that would have to be torn down. But more fundamentally what stood in the way of the bourgeoisie was the power of a highly organised and economically militant proletariat. For well over a decade leading up to Labor leader Bob Hawke's election in 1983, unions in Australia had been able to consistently bring industries to a standstill, pushing back against half-measure attempts to restrain wages and reorganise the economy. While the situation never came close to dual power, it was an ongoing on-again-off-again struggle between the bourgeoisie and the working class over which class should call the shots. The longer this went on the greater the pressures became, deepening and deepening the crisis.

In May 2019, following Hawke's death, former secretary of the Australian Treasury, Ken Henry, spoke to the dangers for the bourgeoisie laid bare by this crisis: "The centralised wage indexation system that we had was so rigid that opening the economy up—and being able to do it in a

way that didn't completely traumatise the economy and society—that was the biggest challenge..." It was clear that the working class of Australia was not going to give up its wages and conditions without a fight. But then, under the Hawke and Keating governments, it seemingly did. Henry continues, "Hawke managed to keep the support of the trade union movement, while overseeing the dismantling of this giant piece of machinery that they were once the masters of." Even in hindsight, almost forty years later, such an outcome is seen by the bourgeoisie as miraculous, "a stroke of genius." And with good reason!

By gaining the consent of the union movement, Hawke and Keating were able to neuter and ultimately gut this "giant piece of machinery." The union bureaucracy became the key backers of the Hawke/Keating program. Crucially, among them were "left" union bureaucrats such as prominent Communist Party (CPA) supporter Laurie Carmichael, who had been instrumental in the 1969 general strike that freed tramways union leader Clarrie O'Shea from prison and who regularly brought production to a halt. The minority who attempted to defy Hawke and Keating, such as the Builders Labourers Federation (BLF) and the pilots' union, were isolated and smashed.

By 1996 workers had suffered 13 years of "shock therapy" under Hawke/Keating rule. Wages were stagnating, the unions were enfeebled and whole swathes of the working class were leaving them. Once heavily unionised mainstays were being gutted, publicly owned companies were being privatised, while manufacturing was being slashed. Unable to trace an independent path forward, much of the left had shrivelled or, like the CPA, outright dissolved. The economy had been restructured in the interests of the ruling class and the basis of Australia's modern liberal order had been bedded down.

The Accords: unions commit harakari

So how did this come to be? In 1979 as president of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), and positioning himself to be the leader of the Labor Party, Hawke, in a lecture titled "The Resolution of Conflict" pointed to the crisis of Australian capitalism, darkly warning:

"Australia stands poised on the threshold of the 1980s more divided within itself, more uncertain of the future, more prone to internal conflict, than at any other period in its history."

Indeed. By 1981-82 Australia was experiencing its fifth recession in ten years and massive working-class unrest. At the same

time, there was a growing weariness and despondency among workers who recognised that despite years of militancy their livelihoods were going downhill. Clearly in spite of the combativeness of the working class, left Laborite trade-union militancy was incapable of solving the crisis that wracked Australian capitalism. In fact, it only exacerbated and deepened it. Workers were increasingly looking for a solution to the standoff.

Two paths were posed. Either the bourgeoisie would take complete charge and reorganise the economy in their interests or the working class would. But standing in the way of the latter was the Laborite bureaucracy shackling the workers movement. Their pro-capitalist program left them balancing between the interests of the capitalists and of the workers. This ensured that at this critical moment they served only to tie the working class to a neoliberal transformation of the economy that was fundamentally against the proletariat's interests. Urgently needed was a leadership that could demonstrate this and break workers from this doomed course. However, no group offered such a leadership.

The ruling class could have attempted to resolve the crisis with a boots-and-all savage crackdown against the working class and its organisations. But such a course would have posed significant risks for the bourgeoisie, potentially inflaming an already combustible situation. One could not predict where that might lead. Instead, the solution for the capitalists was provided by the newly elected Labor prime minister. By the time of the 1983 federal election, Hawke had spent years using his deep connections in the labour movement

to bring about "national reconciliation" and develop a *political solution* for the bourgeoisie.

Working with treasurer Paul Keating and ACTU head Bill Kelty, Hawke's solution came in the form of "consensus-based" Prices and Incomes Accords. These were no-strike agreements, which neutered union power by chaining the unions to the government in the service of the capitalist rulers. Their aim was to suppress wages to reduce inflation and to end industrial conflict so the economy could be restructured unencumbered by proletarian opposition. The whole project was premised on the lie that the two main classes could happily go forward together in the interests of the nation to the mutual benefit of all.

Once elected, Hawke immediately called a national summit between bosses, union leaders and government in which the first Accord was rubber-stamped. Under it, the unions agreed to accept real wage cuts in return for a so-called "social wage." This included two key pillars, a supposedly universal healthcare system in the form of Medicare and the promise of an employer-paid national superannuation scheme. These reforms were packaged up with a neoliberal economic program to, in the words of Kelty, "open up the economy to the rest of the world, increase productivity, [and] promote competition." It wouldn't take long before industrial disputes decreased, the bosses' profits increased and the unions began haemorrhaging.

So why would a traditionally very organised, powerful and militant union movement voluntarily comply with measures that were clearly designed to throttle union activity and scupper their role as the economic defence organisations of the

RB No. 1, Autumn 2024 \$2.00

RED BATTLER

How the Whitlam government paved the way for neoliberalism



iclf.org/pubs/rb/1/whitlam

Left: Sydney, 1973, Builders Labourers union protests for Green Bans, which successfully challenged developers' demolition of buildings such as low-rent inner-city housing. Above: Melbourne, April 1974, Hawke and

Order from/pay to: Spartacist ANZ Publishing Company, PO Box 967, North Melbourne Vic 3051

working class? The answer by most of the left did not go beyond regurgitating the line that Hawke gained union support for his neoliberal program as part of a trade-off for the “social wage.” For instance Socialist Action, the predecessor of Socialist Alternative and Solidarity, argued that the “social wage” on offer didn’t nearly compensate for the attacks and so the unions should never have agreed to the Accords.

But such arguments, which don’t go beyond a program for more militant trade-union struggle to secure greater reforms, disappear the main issue. A real crisis was confronting Australian capitalism and the key reforms underpinning the so-called “social wage,” while offering some benefits to workers, were in fact completely within the framework of the neoliberal transformation of the Australian economy in the interests of the capitalist rulers and international finance capital. Never counterposing to this transformation a working-class political solution, the union misleaders could only fight for a “fairer” neoliberalism. The reformist left, instead of exposing the bureaucracy’s role, tailed its “left” wing, at best trying to pressure them to see what a “bad deal” was offered by the Accords.

Left Laborite betrayal

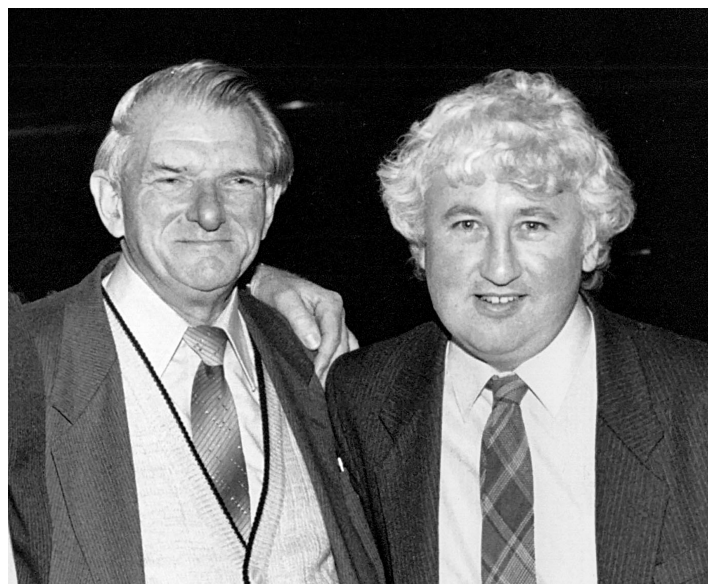
To understand why and how such a betrayal took place it is necessary to understand the social position of the union bureaucracy and its role. As Leon Trotsky observed in his unfinished 1940 work “Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay”:

“...imperialist capitalism can tolerate (i.e., up to a certain time) a reformist bureaucracy only if the latter serves directly as a petty but active stockholder of its imperialist enterprises, of its plans and programmes within the country as well as on the world arena.”

To maintain the positions that their privileges derive from, the Laborite bureaucracy must prove themselves indispensable agents for the ruling class within the workers movement. This was sharply posed in the lead-up to Hawke’s election. For years these bureaucrats had waged economic struggles against a ruling class whose system was in crisis without ever challenging the foundations of that system or offering a political way forward for their working-class base. Instead, they hammered away with strikes and protests to curb capital’s excesses while peddling the Laborite myth that workers and their rulers had a shared national interest and with just enough counterpressure the system could be made to work for all classes. But over the preceding decade this Laborite militancy had not advanced the “national interests” of Australian capitalism but helped push it to the brink.

To continue its existence, Australian capitalism desperately needed to drive down workers’ conditions and reorganise the economy, a task these unions were increasingly standing in the way of. It was against this backdrop that the spectre of Thatcher and Reagan-style union-busting was raised. The union bureaucracy was trapped in a hopeless situation. If they didn’t surrender the bosses would move to break the backs of their unions which would mean losing their positions, jail-time or worse. But open surrender would be intolerable to their working-class base who had fought tooth and nail for decades. In this context, Hawke’s Accords appeared as a godsend. These reforms were the *consummation* of all that the union tops believed in and had fought for in their days of militancy. For them, as for Hawke and Keating, this deal (Accords plus social wage) was proof positive that by improving the prospects of capitalism the working class could get their fair share. This came with the bonus that there would be no need to go into the trenches to get it. Crisis resolved.

Not only would these union leaders be



Partners in crime: union bureaucrat Laurie Carmichael (left) and ACTU secretary Bill Kelty (right). Kelty was instrumental in winning support of “left” bureaucrats like Carmichael for the Accords. Carmichael was rewarded by being able to hobnob with Keating in the halls of power.

tolerated, they would be lauded for helping rescue an ailing system. By participating in the Accords they would get a big seat at the government table, exchanging pleasantries with and influencing legislators. At last, after all their travail, they would be at the helm helping steer the good ship of capitalism in the interests of working people. Or at least that was the fairy tale they told themselves and the working class. Carmichael even went so far as to describe the Accords as “a transitional program for socialism.” Of course, the opposite was true. Unable to put forward an independent solution in the interests of the proletariat, the union bureaucracy could only reconcile the working class to the bourgeoisie’s neoliberal transformation of Australian capitalism. The working class’s striving to improve its livelihood was not channelled against this liberal order but subordinated to it. Emblematic of this process were the left’s iconic “social wage” reforms.

The Superannuation Guarantee (SG) is the sharpest example. It was spun by the ALP and left bureaucrats as an unalloyed progressive reform in which compulsory employer contributions would support workers in retirement while building up a future national savings plan to finance local industry and infrastructure development in a then capital-starved country. A key aim of this scheme was in fact to reduce the welfare bill by transferring the government’s former responsibility to provide modest retirement benefits to a completely individualised, privately managed scheme supplemented by an increasingly rundown pension system. In many ways, this reform perfectly reflected the Laborite goals and outlook of the Hawke/Keating government and union bureaucracy. SG was designed to become a massive slush fund for giant asset management firms to speculate with on the stock market, giving finance capital a boost while also tying workers’ retirement benefits to the fortunes of international finance capital. Even for the upper layers of the working class who were able to develop a “nest egg,” their retirement plan was completely contingent on the success of Australian capitalism.

As for Medicare, which the Laborite leaders spruiked as a universal healthcare system and a great advance for public health, it was no such thing. To be sure it provided free public hospital and emergency treatment. In the early days it also provided mostly free consults with private General Practitioners (GPs) who were subsidised by the system. These benefits were not to be sniffled at. However, far from being a universal national healthcare system, Medicare excluded many areas of healthcare. Furthermore, subsidies to GPs and the whole system were paid for by a levy on workers’ wages over and above their income tax. Whatever benefits fell to workers, far from overhauling the public system, Medicare actually helped *entrench private delivery* of healthcare while doing nothing to improve and expand the drastically underfunded and crumbling public healthcare system, such

that today private medical insurance is increasingly necessary.

It is true that some, including an upper layer of workers, gained some material benefit in the short to medium term from these reforms and from Australian capitalism being extracted from its malaise. However, this came at the price of completely enslaving the proletariat to the ruling class’s interests at a critical moment. The betrayal by the union bureaucracy, including the crucial role played by the left bureaucrats in selling the Accords to their militant base, ensured the capitalist rulers a free hand to move forward with their plans to develop a new model of unfettered capitalist rule in which, as Keating put it, “increasing the profit share was the name of the game.” The result was the devastation of many sections of the proletariat and an overall deterioration of the position of the working class. This process, where the union tops truly began sawing off their own legs, would ultimately redound on the left and labour movement emboldening the bosses to wage more and greater attacks.

The handcuffing of the unions to the state while opening up the economy to international competition had a self-reinforcing dynamic. The power of international finance capital in the economy grew as the power of the organised labour movement decreased. The government began their economic “reforms” by floating the Australian dollar and deregulating the banks. By 1988 they had put forward a massive phased reduction in tariffs. As tariff walls came down, uncompetitive industries were closed, leaving tens of thousands of workers in manufacturing, textiles and other industries out of work. The result of this was not a “more competitive” local industry as Hawke, Keating and Kelty projected but a decimated one. Formerly protected industries were shuttered wholesale, the industries shielded were ones that couldn’t simply pack up and leave such as mining and agriculture. The Australian economy became increasingly parasitic while tightening its bonds to US finance capital which under Reagan was undertaking a similar process.

Blackmail, threats, state repression

This reorganisation of the economy was not a seamless process. It required the continued support of the workers movement especially as attacks escalated. While the union bureaucrats were fraternising with their patrons in the halls of (capitalist) power, workers who had initially supported the Accords were continually confronted with the new reality of Hawke and Keating’s Australia. Disillusionment was beginning to grow in the proletariat against the deceptions peddled by the bureaucracy that the Accords were a “transitional program for socialism” or similar lies. This was particularly true for a broad stratum of workers, living precariously from pay cheque to pay cheque, including the likes of the BLF. For the Hawke/Keating program to succeed these workers

needed to either be marshalled back into line or isolated and smashed.

Government blackmail and threats played a crucial role in keeping restive workers in line. Workers were told that if they challenged the Accords and went on strike, they would destroy the new economy and the country would quickly fall back into crisis. This time, the government warned, the crisis would be terminal, leaving everyone to suffer an impoverished future. This included the veiled threat that if the unions no longer conformed, they would all suffer the savage treatment Margaret Thatcher had dished out to British workers. Reinforcing Hawke’s earlier fears of Australia becoming the “white trash of Asia,” in 1986 Keating warned that Australia would become a “banana republic” unless workers continued to make sacrifices under the Accords. At this time, facing a significant drop in the price of commodities, Keating declared:

“...if we don’t make it now we never will make it. If the government cannot get the [economic] adjustment, get manufacturing going again and keep moderate wage outcomes and a sensible economic policy, then Australia is basically done for. We will just end up being a third-rate economy.”

—Keating, Kerry O’Brien (2015)

Reflecting the very real weaknesses of capitalist Australia, Keating’s “banana republic” comments nearly crashed the economy. The government demanded the working class pay. An austerity budget was announced, promised tax breaks for workers were binned and union leaders agreed to further wage restraint. It was in the context of these threats and cuts that the government moved decisively to extract what Keating called the “rotten teeth” of the union movement by crushing and deregistering the militant BLF for defying the Accords by fighting for higher wages. Three years later the government would defeat the pilot union’s wage push by using the air force to replace striking pilots.

The smashing of these unions exemplified how crucial maintaining the Accords was to the legitimacy of the Labor government. Without the success of this pact, they had nothing to offer the ruling class and would be done for. That is why taking on the Accords meant going smack up against the most powerful forces in the country, including the Labor government, the Labor-loyal ACTU leadership, the left union bureaucrats and the capitalist state. The attack on the BLF was a watershed moment for the labour movement. The situation cried out for revolutionary leadership. Had the attack become a spark for broader working-class struggles, breaking the stranglehold of the Accords on the labour movement, then the whole course and development of the country could have changed.

Smashing of the BLF

At the time the government brought the hammer down against the BLF, workers were increasingly confronted with falling living standards. Textile and manufacturing workers across the country were beginning to lose their jobs as industries closed. As for the BLF base, they saw their livelihoods diminish as their wages fell and the bosses’ profits soared. Harking back to the old-school union militancy of the ’70s, these workers demanded wage increases as part of gaining their “slice of the pie.” Under pressure from the base, the BLF leadership under federal secretary Norm Gallagher, having initially supported the Accords, decided to defy them.

But this defiance was based not on a class-wide fight against the Hawke/Keating government but on the BLF’s traditional guerrilla tactics of applying bans and carrying out militant actions on individual building sites. There was, however, no going back to the militant trade unionism of the ’60s and ’70s which had brought the country to a stalemate. Defy-

continued on page 14

Abolish the monarchy!



For a workers republic!

We print below a speech given by comrade C. Bouchier at a 19 October united-front demonstration called by the Revolutionary Communist Organisation (RCO) protesting the visit of King Charles to Australia. It has been slightly edited for publication.

Hello comrades. Thank you everyone who has showed up today, and thank you to the RCO in particular for calling this demo. We welcome this opportunity to protest not just the King's visit but against the existence of this feudal relic altogether. King Charles' trip to Australia is not some benign holiday of his to be ignored. It is an affirmation of his authority as King and head of state of this country—a direct affront to all working people and to the most elementary of democratic sentiment. As such, it is crucially important to protest his visit, to fight like hell to drive this old man with his new hat out of this country—to recall the fate of Charles the First and smash the monarchy altogether. We in the Spartacist League say: **Abolish the monarchy! Forward to a workers republic!**

King Charles sits atop a throne of blood, the ugly face of a monarchy that has presided over centuries of crimes against the working class and oppressed the world over. It was the monarchy's governments that massacred the Mau Mau in Kenya; that committed atrocities in Malaya; that turned the carving and butchering of Palestine from Zionist fantasy to genocidal reality. The British Empire's colonies and its post-federation successor waged brutal genocidal wars against the Aboriginal people, stealing their land and strangling their language and culture—something that is continuing today. And against the working people of this country, it was the monarchy's troops which were sent in to suppress any who dared to rebel from Castle Hill to Eureka, many of them led by the very Chartists and Irish rebels that were forcibly shipped to this land. Today, his majesty's governments in Britain and Australia are desperately holding on to the declining US-led world order, supporting the ongoing genocide in Gaza and forging the AUKUS military pact—part of an anti-China war drive which promises nothing less than death and destruction for the Chinese people, the working class of Australia and beyond.

The monarchy is far from an irrelevant and harmless artefact of bygone days. In fact, it is integral to the maintenance of Australian capitalism. The King's Governor-General has the power to impose martial law and dismiss governments. The ruling class has again and again relied on the monarchy as a bastion of reaction to defend their rule—in times of crisis serving as the focus of the *real* forces directed against the working class. In fact, the monarch represents the most perfect living manifestation of the Australian ruling class's strategy—previously, as the stalwart barking dog of the British Empire, and since then, alongside the mother country, as a junior partner to the American Empire.

What happened to Whitlam is instructive. His government's failure to placate a restive working class and solve the crisis of Australian capitalism, alongside his questioning of the US spy base in Pine Gap, attracted the ire of not just the US, but



Spartacist speaker (left) at rally (right) against visit of King Charles III to Australia. Melbourne, 19 October.

RB photos

the British and Australian ruling classes who had by then hitched their wagon to American imperialism's fortunes. As a result, the American CIA and the British MI5 connived with the monarchy to throw Whitlam out. This was met with rapture from the Australian capitalists. At a most critical moment, the ruling class relied on the British monarchy and their American big brother to defend the interests of Australian capitalism.

Now as times are looking increasingly uncertain, the ruling class is clinging on ever tighter to the monarchy. Today, self-declared republican Albanese looks to the King as both a distraction to help shore up Australia's "social cohesion" as well as a safeguard for when that social cohesion falls apart. Meanwhile, the powers that be continue to paint the monarchy with a benign veneer in the classic Australian fashion. That is, portraying the monarchy's existence as representing little more than coin mintage, street names and the occasional royal tour.

In such a climate, what is necessary is to refuse to swallow the ruling class's lies and not take this affront lying down. The workers movement should not have so much as let the King land in this country and as he managed to land, to drive him out of town through strikes and protests. If successful, this could have seriously weakened the already weak Labor government and opened the door for the working class to fight back.

Instead, in spite of all the talk of burying Labor, the union bureaucracy has not said a word, twiddling their thumbs and pretending not to notice the King's arrival. As for much of the left, intoxicated by a mixture of sectarianism and state-induced apathy, they have refused to even consider combining our modest forces and fighting to protest both Charles' arrival and the monarchy itself. To this we say: If you aren't going to stand up to the monarchy when it counts, if your opposition to the monarchy is at best slick words on a paper, how the hell are you actually going to take on the ruling class and their interests?

And when you boil it down, that is the question that the fight for a republic comes down to: what is the leadership of the republican and workers movement, and do they have the capacity to overthrow Australian capitalism? The ruling class is not going to do away with one

of their best last lines of defence, especially not in times that increasingly look like that they might just need it. If the movement is led by those who aren't even going to try to take on the ruling class *you haven't got a chance!*

Nowhere is this clearer than in the lukewarm liberal official representatives of Republicanism. Charles' arrival was inaugurated by an encounter with republicans—not in the form of protest but rather a prostrating prime minister and premier before their King. As for the so-called "Australian Republic Movement," they don't dare to protest against the King during his visit, meekly holding zoom meetings and making a toast celebrating his departure. That is, when the coast is clear from any potential friction with a ruling class currently bathing in his majesty's royal prerogatives.

As for the workers movement, it is everywhere led by leaders who bow down to Albanese, who in turn bows down before the crown. In spite of all the talks of burying Labor, they are still attached at the hip to the Labor Party and the ruling class they administer for. The strategy of even the most left-posing bureaucrats in unions such as the MUA, ETU and the CFMEU has been to support and influence Labor to "make capitalism work" for their memberships. In the wake of Albanese's union busting, they have at best done one-day demos while declaring their intent to "bury Labor" in the next election in the hopes that the ALP "learns their lesson." On the arrival of the King they have kept

to this pattern, silently hiding in a corner, refusing to even attempt to smash Albanese's precious social cohesion.

This is not unique to Australia. Upon the Queen's death, the trade-union bureaucrats of the British TUC, including the "left" "heroes" of the so-called summer of discontent, criminally cancelled strikes *during an ongoing strike wave*, instead proclaiming their deepest sorrow at such a "loss." Against such boot-licking prostrating, our comrades in Britain organised the *only* demonstration against the monarchy in London on the day of the Queen's funeral. As for almost all the British left, tailing the bureaucracy that was actively leading the strike wave to defeat, they *boycotted the demonstration*.

Unfortunately, this has been repeated here in Australia with many on the left deciding to remain in the peanut gallery, refusing to build or even show up to this protest. As for the RCO, to their credit, they have initiated this demonstration. What's more, they can correctly argue the necessity of revolutionary republicanism and the need for revolution more broadly.

But the central roadblock to fight for a republic is the current leadership of the workers movement, which ties the working class to Labor and the ruling class. The fight for not just a republic but for revolution itself is inseparable from the fight to remove this roadblock, to drive a wedge between the working-class base and the bourgeois top of the workers movement. Not through abstract declarations of the

continued on page 19



AAP Images/Lukas Coch

Republican Prime Minister Albanese bows and scrapes before King Charles III, Parliament House, Canberra.

Permanent Revolution

& the fight for revolutionary leadership today



Early 1920s poster of the French Communist Youth, captioned: "Massacres of populations in Morocco, Tripolitania, Syria, China, preparation for war against the Soviet Union, such is the so-called imperialist peace. Moroccans, Algerians, Tunisians, Syrians! Organise the revolutionary struggle against the war, to defend the Soviet Union, to defeat imperialism and win your independence unite with French proletarians."

In June 2024 the Spartacist League of Australia debated the International Bolshevik Tendency (IBT) at Trades Hall, Melbourne. The event drew around thirty people, mostly members and supporters of the two organisations as well as of the Revolutionary Communist Organisation and the Platypus outfit. The IBT emerged from individuals who left the forerunner of the ICL in the 1980s. The topic of our debate, "Permanent Revolution and the struggle for revolutionary leadership today," not only reflects the ICL's programmatic reorientation (see *Spartacist* No. 68, September 2023) and the IBT's central criticism of it, but strikes at the core of the Marxist struggle for revolutionary leadership in the neocolonial world.

In her presentation, SL/A National Chairman C. Bourchier motivated the ICL's reassertion, against longstanding revisionism, of permanent revolution as the positive Marxist program for national liberation and anti-imperialism. Frankly, we found it surprising that the IBT's response was to emphatically declare that they too see national liberation as a motor force for social revolution. We welcome such a position, the problem is that it is completely contradicted by every single concrete perspective the IBT defended at the debate.

For instance, while the ICL's presentation and floor interventions emphasised the pressing struggle for Palestinian liberation, and the broader historic tasks for Marxists, the IBT could only muddy the waters. When questioned on the 1948 Zionist ethnic cleansing which gave birth to Israel (and historic Spartacism's reactionary pro-Israel and later dual defeatist line on the 1948 Arab-Israeli war) the IBT responded that they take a side "for defence of Palestinian homes in the Nakba" but not on the war in which the victory or defeat of the Nakba was decided! When we pressed the question: do you fight to free Palestine "from the river to the sea," they lamely ducked our argument as simply being "whether we do or don't endorse a slogan, a chant." But the point of our argument was to concretise the implications of the pseudo-Marxist "interpenetrated peoples" theory, a mainstay of "old Spartacism" slavishly defended today by the IBT. What the IBT's response con-

firmed is that the real content of this "theory" is to obscure the distinction between oppressed and oppressor nations and reject the fight for Palestinian national liberation in fear of "reversing the terms of national oppression." (For more on this question see "Marxists & Palestine: 100 Years of Failure," *Spartacist* No. 69, August 2024.)

Charging the ICL with abandoning the Trotskyist transitional program as "old hat," what the IBT misses is that our whole program on permanent revolution is *precisely* a struggle for the transitional program in the neocolonial world. As Trotsky put it, in

Africa has been the fight to raise an independent class-struggle pole against the EFF's parliamentary class-collaborationism. *This* is what it means to draw a class line between the powerful aspirations of the masses for black freedom and a leadership chained to the status quo and bourgeoisie. *This* is the real content of the anti-imperialist united front: a fight to explode unity with the national bourgeoisie not, as the IBT caricatures, to seek a "permanent alliance" with it.

Beneath the IBT's muck, the debate made clear that the central political diver-

gent, class-struggle program to the pressing needs and aspirations of the masses. We have no illusions that a small organisation like the ICL could today seize the leadership of mass workers and national movements. But only concrete intervention on this basis can lay the foundations for and build the revolutionary party capable of doing this. Far from aiming at a "fake mass orientation," as the IBT chirps, our work has fought to drive a wedge through the ruptures in the workers and anti-imperialist movements to plant a revolutionary pole.

This is what a small Marxist group, armed with a revolutionary program, can and must do. It was what our organisation did in the face of counterrevolution and the collapse of Stalinism in East Germany and the Soviet Union. At this critical moment—a world historic conjuncture for the working class—the ICL stood at its post and fought for revolutionary leadership. Reflecting their underlying outlook that any real revolutionary intervention by a small group is impossible, the IBT took pains in the debate to denounce this intervention specifically as "delusion." But the real delusion is to believe that the Marxist program can exist divorced from the living class struggle and the fight for leadership. As our comrade concluded in her summary remarks:

"We fought for a revolutionary leadership then, and now we have affirmed the fight for revolutionary leadership in the neocolonies. In truth, we are not junking everything good with the ICL. In fact, we have affirmed the best of it and extended it. Back then the IBT, like today, sneered and belittled this fight for political revolution. Today, they similarly sneer at the fight of us using national liberation as a motor force for revolution in the neocolonies. For the IBT, revolutionary leadership, communism are all phrases they like to tack on at the end of articles, but are nothing but a mantra. This is the definition of centrism."

Our struggle has been to reassert the program of Lenin and Trotsky, as well as the most revolutionary aspects of our own history. A critical re-evaluating of our tendency's past has been central to our programmatic reorientation, but unlike the IBT we continue to study this history only insofar as it progresses the

continued on page 15



RB photo

Spartacist presenter, C. Bourchier, debates IBT.

the semicolonial and backward countries: "Democratic slogans, transitional demands, and the problems of the socialist revolution are not divided into separate historical epochs in this struggle, but stem directly from one another...The central task of the colonial and semicolonial countries are the *agrarian revolution*, i.e., liquidation of feudal heritages, and *national independence*, i.e., the overthrow of the imperialist yoke. The two tasks are closely linked with each other."

—*The Transitional Program*,
Leon Trotsky (1938)

The transitional program fights to bridge existing consciousness and aspirations to the question of class power. This is precisely the content of our critical support to the black nationalist Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) in South Africa, for all the IBT's hue and cry over that intervention. As the *AmaBolshevik* *Amnyama* article republished in this issue of *Red Battler* (page 7) makes clear, the whole thrust of our recent work in South

gence between our organisations is counterposed conceptions of the tasks of Marxists in the fight for revolutionary leadership. Encapsulating their perspective put forward at the debate, they afterwards wrote that the "role of a numerically weak Trotskyist organisation...is to fight for leadership on a realistic scale while outlining a program and strategy for workers' power"—a program they determine "will necessarily have something of an abstract and anticipatory quality" in the absence of a mass revolutionary party. As we see it, the real outcome of their perspective is not fighting for revolutionary leadership *anywhere* on *any* scale but a sterile regurgitation of "Marxist" formulae, lines, and slogans—arrayed against the living reality of the class struggle with all its contours, including national ones.

The real struggle for revolutionary leadership is to connect, at every single juncture, the urgent necessity for an

How we got here, how to fight back



GCIS

[illegible]

Crossroads...

(continued from page 1)

strangled under Albanese's Labor, ensuring a strengthening of right-wing reaction. For the former course to succeed, what is necessary is a break from today's union leadership, which at each step betrays the struggle. It is this last point, the question of leadership itself, which is central to each article in this issue of *Red Battler*.

Tightening vice: Australia and the death of liberalism

To borrow the phrase used in a bizarre statement by the CFMEU Victoria administrators, "What the f**k is going on?" In *Red Battler*'s last issue, we explained how the "lucky country" was managing to hold on to their luck for just that bit longer. Australia's much lauded stability has been contingent on two forces: the success of Australia's US big brother and the growth of China. But the mineral trade with China that Australian capitalism has been dependent on for so long is now threatened by the Chinese economy slowing down, and promises to have a sharp termination as the US increasingly targets Australia's largest trading partner. Nevertheless, while the US and its Australian lackey are on a collision course with China, this collision is yet to occur.

Thus, Australian capitalism has been able to subsist in its crevice between a rock and a hard place. The economy remains gloomy but not spiralling downwards, working-class discontent festers but is not yet bursting to the surface. For the time being, the ruling class deludes itself that with just the right amount of policy tinkering Australia can be an oasis exempt from world crisis. This delusion was captured by Labor treasurer Jim Chalmers, who penned a piece in July proclaiming that while "we" can't be complacent, "Australia can be an island of decency and opportunity in a violent and divided world."

The bosses and their Labor government have certainly not been complacent. The strategy of the ruling class over the past period has been defined by its attempts to cling on to post-Soviet stability as it deteriorates. This task has become increasingly fruitless, with even the most optimistic bourgeois economists finding it hard to deny coming economic troubles for the lucky country. Australia's tenuous hold on social discontent threatens to be torn asunder. Tony Shepherd, former president of the Business Council of Aus-

tralia, recently spoke to the anxiety of his class, bemoaning the fact that "We are a one-trick pony relying heavily on mining and resources, with our two largest customers (China and Japan) both in recession. In a volatile geopolitical environment what could go wrong?" Quite a lot!

The ruling class's economic anxiety has merged with a social one. Today, "social cohesion" have become its watchwords, with the capitalists struggling to contain the frustrations that threaten to tear apart Australia's "social fabric" in a way that does not provoke those frustrations further. This has put them in the most precarious of positions. Already at the time of last year's defeat of the Voice referendum, it was clear that in the context of plummeting living conditions liberal tokenism would be more tarnish than varnish for the Labor government. Since then, Albanese has dumped much of the liberal moralising that has only bought him flack and tried to present his government as less moralising, more "cost-of-living focused." But the government is incapable of even maintaining the current paltry standards of living for working people. In this context of social decay, Albanese's "focus" has amounted to little more than nothing burger schemes. Albanese tackles "hidden card surcharges"...by making laws to stop them from being hidden. He "wipes out millions in university debt"...by adjusting the metric HECS uses to adjust for inflation. He "tackles shrinkflation"...through "unit pricing." Bourgeois economist Steven Hamilton summed up Albo's conundrum when he compared the government's measures to rearranging the deckchairs on the *Titanic* with no regard for the iceberg ahead.

As these trends have continued, defending the "social fabric" from the "consequences of social marginalisation" has become less carrot and more stick—a tightening vice over the workers movement. The Labor government has been eager but careful in clamping down on the burgeoning social opposition. After subduing ructions within the workers movement over Palestine, it quickly moved to increase repression against protesters on the streets. This is also the context for the attack on the CFMEU, a pre-emptive strike against a union that had continued to stick their heads up against the trends of "fair go" social decay. This attack sent a clear message to the workers movement to "sit down and shut up—or else."

While such attacks were necessary for the ruling class's interests, their suc-



RB photo

Melbourne, 8 November, Partisan Defence Committee-initiated protest in defence of Nigerian activists.

cess was not inevitable. Conditions were primed to not just rally the class to defend itself from these attacks, but to turn the tables and strike a blow against Albanese. But throughout the country, the workers movement is led by pro-capitalist leaders subordinate to the Labor government, betraying the fight at each critical moment.

The takeover of the CFMEU without a shot fired is the clearest example of this. As for the pro-Palestine movement, saddled with a program of impotent liberal outrage and attached to left-talking union leaders, it has been unable to effect any change to stop the genocide. It is these "Friends of Palestine" union bureaucrats (and their friends leading the pro-Palestine protests) that are chiefly responsible for disarming working-class sentiment for action in defence of Palestine, transforming it into harmless speechifying and empty motions. Working-class opposition has dissipated, protests have dwindled and the rump of the movement is tearing itself apart. This has emboldened the Labor government to increase attacks and ramp up repression without fear of backlash.

With each outburst of resistance contained within Labor's orbit, nowhere in this country has the working class been able to enter the fray as an independent factor. As a result, working-class frustrations have not led to the workers movement standing as a force capable of challenging the status quo and shaping the situation in its interests. Instead, the political terrain has shifted rightwards. Opposition leader Dutton is more and more assured in his program, looking increasingly likely to win government at the next election.

The election of Trump has further accelerated these trends. His comeback, a reflection of US hegemony slipping away, has dealt a death blow to liberalism as the dominant ideology of the Western ruling classes (see "Death of liberalism," page 20). Across the West, yesterday's liberal darlings, such as Justin Trudeau, Nicola Sturgeon and Jacinda Ardern, are being

thrown out one after another, with right-wing reaction becoming ascendant. Australia is no different.

Today Dutton openly opines about Australia's "eerie parallels" with America, situating himself presumably as Australia's Trump. To avoid the fate of New Zealand ex-PM Ardern, Albanese has increasingly taken the road of British prime minister, Sir Keir Starmer. In the place of liberal moralising both Albanese and Dutton proclaim their commitment to "prioritising cost-of-living" while testing the waters for more. In the lead-up to the next election a race to the bottom has begun as they both try to prove that they are the toughest on immigrants, on protesters, on "youth delinquency."

Today, the Liberal Party brags about running Labor's immigration policy. While the LNP in Queensland proclaims "Adult Crime, Adult Time" in their "youth crime" crackdown, the Labor government is on their own "social cohesion" binge, spearheading a crackdown on youth and more—from the ban on youth accessing social media to draconian anti-protest laws. On each point the liberal tokenism is being dumped while its remaining reactionary kernel flourishes.

In the international arena, Trump's victory signals a changing strategy of American imperialism to reverse its ever declining position. The newly inaugurated president has not hidden his desire to cut a deal with Russia to end the war in Ukraine, which would free up the imperialists to focus on targeting China. This has left the Australian ruling class in a hopeless balancing act: trying to maximise the good times of yesterday's *engagement* while aiding the US' bid to renew the good times through today's *confrontation*.

Albanese spent his tenure mending relations with Australia's biggest trading partner (for which he received hearty congratulations from Beijing), but with Trump's ascension it is clear that the American imperialists, with their Australian tail wagging behind, need to tear this all down in the war drive against China.

Subscribe Now!

RED BATTLER

Marxist newspaper of the
Spartacist League of Australia

☐ \$10 for 4 issues ☐ \$15 International rate

Subscription includes *Spartacist*, organ of the ICL (Fourth Internationalist)

I would like to contribute \$_____ to the production of *Red Battler*

Name _____

Address _____

State _____ Postcode _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Cheques in Australian dollars to: Spartacist ANZ Publishing Company,
PO Box 967, North Melbourne Vic 3051



iclfi.org/subscribe

Τροτσκιστική Ομάδα της Ελλάδας



Subscription: \$10.00 for 4 issues

Order from: Spartacist ANZ Publishing Company
PO Box 967, North Melbourne Vic 3051

iclfi.org/grc



When this happens, this act of economic kamikaze by the Australian bourgeoisie is sure to bring the country to its knees. While today there still remains a fatuous optimism that Australia can be the global exception in maintaining the stability of the days of yore, the ruling class is in for a rude awakening. The CPC may praise Albanese and his supposed “strategic autonomy” as the statesman for Trump’s allies to emulate, but it is already clear where Australian ruling-class loyalties lie. The “one-trick pony” is in for a wild ride.

Potential trade wars and a ramped up war drive against China coupled with a global economy facing serious trouble will pose point blank the realities of the coming period for Australian capitalism. When it does, the Australian ruling class will be happy to drop whatever liberal baggage not already jettisoned as it becomes increasingly too expensive and too ineffective. The findings of the recent inquiry into the lockdowns (which acknowledged that the ruling class would be unable to repeat the “success” of lockdowns again) is itself an open admission by the bourgeoisie that yesterday’s liberalism will be non-viable the next time the ruling class resorts to crisis measures. When crisis reaches Australia’s shores again, the gloves will be off (as if “gloves on” wasn’t bad enough!) and the ruling class will make sure that workers will foot the increasingly pricey bill to maintaining Australia’s “social fabric.” The question is: will the working class fight this course, or be dragged down with it?

As we have argued, this question is far from settled. The proletariat is far from having its final word. Following the pandemic, unlike other countries such as the US, Britain and France, Australia did not see any strike waves explode and subsequently recede. While the CFMEU takeover has dealt a serious blow, it is clear that as of yet the working class has neither seriously flexed its muscles nor been dealt a decisive defeat. The past months have already seen clear signs of proletarian unrest from Woolworths warehouse workers to rail workers in Sydney and more. Much of what has been Labor’s base has reacted in outrage to the government’s union-busting moves. The reverberations of the attack on the CFMEU, felt by some of the most advanced layers of the working class, and the percolating resistance among the organised working class more generally, are more than capable of being a catalyst for the proletariat to enter as a serious, independent force.

The precariousness of the situation has not been lost on the bourgeoisie. The attack on the CFMEU speaks to the increasing necessity for the ruling class to take drastic action to stave off a feared explosion of the working class. But even here, Albo has painted this attack in pro-worker colours, with newly appointed administrators entering with union-studded cred and cynical declarations to “stand up and fight back.” It is only thanks to the yeoman’s service of ex-and-current “left” bureaucrats that class anger has been so far kept under control.

The Labor government is hated and weak. Strong working-class action, with a leadership willing and able to *confront* and *strike a blow* against the ruling class could further weaken, if not bring down, Albanese and blow open the door for the working class to march forwards. But this requires a strategy fundamentally counterposed to the current leadership of the workers movement who anchor the proletariat to the sinking ship of Australian capitalism.

The recent strike at Woolworths warehouses is indicative of both the capacity of the working class, as well as the incapacity of its “leaders.” The desire for a fight was there. Workers picketed all five warehouses. For 17 days nothing moved in or out. Trucks were turned around and scabs were deterred. The strike had broad support from workers across the country



AAP/Melissa Meehan

Workers’ picket at Woolworths Dandenong Distribution Centre, 3 December. Strike had broad support. Could have landed blow against Albanese’s Labor regime but union leaders bowed to “Fair Work” Commission diktats.

already furious at Woolies’ blatant price-gouging during a cost-of-living crisis. With the strike giving Woolies a \$140 million dollar hole in its pocket, it had the potential to not only land a real blow against the company but to spark broader struggles throughout the country. What was needed was a *real class battle* with mass pickets that no one could cross and a broadening of the strike.

But the bureaucrats leading the strike, attached at the hip to the Labor government, refused to take up such a fight against the bosses that the government administers for. Instead, the union leadership immediately capitulated to the bosses’ “Fair Work” Commission accepting its diktats to take down the pickets and let scabs in. As a result, the strike was abruptly ended with the union accepting Woolies’ paltry offer far short of any of the workers’ demands.

In the coming period, communists must fight to leverage every ruction within the labour movement, every burgeoning expression of proletarian unrest, towards the working class imposing itself as an independent political force that can fight in its interests against the bosses and their Labor government. This requires nothing less than a ruthless struggle to break the proletariat from its current leadership as it leads the class to even greater defeats. It is this that has defined the SL/A’s ongoing interventions over the past months and our perspective for the period to come. It is this that represents the central difference between our organisation and all others in Australia.

What way forwards? The left and the tasks ahead

Unfortunately, much of the left have continued to repeat the mistakes of the previous decades, remaining at best liberal critics of the Laborite bureaucracy. Unable to explain or effect the class dynamics of the country in ever more uncertain times, much of the left stands exposed and isolated.

Many groups continue to peddle false hopes and illusions, while continuing to repeat the mistakes of years gone by. In this sense they reflect some of the fatuous optimism of the ruling class itself. Pro-Palestine movement dwindling? No it isn’t—it has been success after success! CFMEU being put under administration? Union leaders will sound the alarm when the administrators cross the line in the sand...eventually. Varying in how deep their heads are stuck in the sand, all of them share in their apologia for the leadership responsible for such failures. Groups like Socialist Alternative, Solidarity and Socialist Alliance fall into this trend.

Otherwise there are those who proclaim loudly their opposition to the union bureaucracy and their steadfast commitment to revolution, but are unable to put forward a counterposed strategy for victory. Rather, they attempt to replace it with nice-sounding slogans and formulas divorced from the class struggle. On this count are groups such as the Socialist

Equality Party and other sectarian groups in the peanut gallery, who are thus irrelevant to ongoing political developments.

The Revolutionary Communist Organisation manage to have their feet in both camps. For all their revolutionary rhetoric, they have repeatedly shown themselves unable to forge a path forwards in the struggles against the pro-capitalist leadership. In fact, when push comes to shove they have repeatedly *tailed* this leadership! (see “Abolish the Monarchy,” page 5 and “What the f**k happened?” page 10). Ultimately this is the result of their “broad church” party building strategy to “refound the Communist Party” through “unity, unity, unity”! Not through the “unity of Marxists” but by seeking “unity between Marxists, and opponents and distorters of Marxism” (to quote Lenin). This offers no way to forge the revolutionary party they correctly proclaim the necessity of. In fact, it subordinates their organisation to the opportunists who repeat the mistakes that have plagued the left over the past decades.

What all of these groups share is a rejection of what the ICL reasserted in its reorientation. That the task for Marxists is to put forward, at every juncture, a revolutionary strategy to guide the struggles of the working class and oppressed *against* their rotten pro-imperialist leadership and conciliators who betray the fight. It is this question that is central to our interventions and articles, and represents our central difference with other left organisations.

At each step we have sought to put forward a revolutionary strategy to promote a split between the working class and its leaders who cripple their struggles. In the pro-Palestine movement we have continually sought to expose the so-called “Friends of Palestine” who are beholden to the Labor government, which in turn follows the lead of the US in backing genocide in Gaza. Earlier this year we fought for united-front contingents calling to break the US connection, and since, we have fought to defend TU4P from the attacks of the Victorian Trades Hall Council bureaucrats who are in a bloc with Labor’s cops (see “Cops out of the workers movement,” page 18 and “Palestine Movement Impasse,” page 20).

Similarly, through our recent interventions in defence of the CFMEU, we fought to expose the CFMEU tops’ role in paving the way for administration (see “What the f**k happened,” page 10 and “Workers need class-struggle leadership,” page 11). The betrayal of the misnamed Labor government and the ACTU leadership, has thoroughly discredited them in the eyes of many militant workers. This is the context of our call to chuck the bosses’ lackeys out of the ALP/ACTU, which aims to direct working-class anger in a positive direction against the union busters and their left-talking conciliators (see “Bust the union busters!” page 1).

Communists must continue to look for avenues to break from the current impasse and smash Albanese’s much guarded “social cohesion.” Our participation in and fight for anti-Monarchy demonstrations upon the King’s arrival (see page 5) was a modest but concrete example of this. Especially in the context of the tightening vice on the workers and the Palestinian movement, it is imperative to prepare for concrete united-front defence actions. The demonstrations initiated by the Partisan Defence Committee in defence of Michael Pröbsting and Nigerian activists on trial (see page 2) are small contributions to this. Statements of solidarity are not enough! We have been fighting for united-front actions to draw together the broadest possible forces for class-struggle defence of activists facing charges. This is of special importance in regards to the fractured Palestinian movement as it faces demoralisation, defeat and repression.

Through these united-front actions, we have sought to break down sectarian barriers within the left. Crucially, this entails debate and struggle inside the left, looking for programmatic clarity for the necessary tasks ahead and drawing the correct lessons of the previous period. It was for this purpose that we debated the International Bolshevik Tendency (see page 6) and continue to engage with others on the left on the most pressing questions of the day. Important strides have also been made in this issue in assimilating the lessons of the Hawke/Keating government, a government which was able to dismantle a once-powerful union movement and lay down the basis for the modern liberal order (see “How Hawke and Keating beat the left,” page 3).

As we put it in the editorial of *Spartacist* No. 69, “Of course, we are a small organization, and we know that this work is of modest proportions. However, it is not modest in its aims.” Crisis is approaching Australian capitalism. If left groups do not change course, when the reality of the coming period imposes itself on Australian capitalism, it will do the same to them. For those who are not content with vapid declarations of “onwards and upwards,” for those who are looking to assimilate the lessons of the defeats of yesterday to fight for the victory of tomorrow, we encourage you to study this issue of *Red Battler*, which is our contribution towards this fight. ■

New issue

spartacist.org/en/69

\$6.00

Order from: Spartacist ANZ Publishing Company
PO Box 967, North Melbourne Vic 3051

Not Imperialist, Not Capitalist

The Class Nature of China

Also in this issue: China, India, Argentina, France, and more

CFMEU takeover:

“What the f**k happened?”

The most militant union in Australia, the CFMEU's construction division, is under government control. Hundreds of officials are banned from ever holding union office again. For at least the next three years the union is ruled by a King's Counsellor, able to hire and fire whoever he wants and dispose of union assets at will. All union EBAs are subject to special review, already leading to pay cuts for thousands. Organisers and delegates are being purged, with those deemed “obstructionist” by the administrator facing up to two years jail time.

How is this possible? This is a union whose leadership broke anti-union laws countless times, who stared down three Royal Commissions and the union-busting ABCC, and on occasions risked their own imprisonment. Leading up to the takeover, Queensland secretary Michael Ravbar swore “We will defend each other to the ends of the earth.” New South Wales secretary Darren Greenfield recently declared he would defend the union to the “last breath in my fucking body.” Former Victorian secretary John Setka repeatedly vowed that no one would ever get the CFMEU.

There was no lack of verbal militancy in the union's leadership. At times, this also translated into militancy on the ground. But the reality is these leaders were not up for an all-out confrontation with the Labor government they had worked hard to put and keep in power—which is what was desperately required to repel this historic assault. The CFMEU had in fact been a key part of the ALP machine, even after Albanese expelled Setka in 2019. Setka's quitting a day before the “Building Bad” media hitjob captures the problem. He says he quit because he thought he had a deal with the ACTU and government not to put the union into administration in exchange for his resignation. If true, this is a damning admission officials knew Albanese was contemplating a takeover before “Building Bad” even broke, and kept this secret from the membership. Even more damning, it

reveals the touching faith of Setka & co in the words of the snake oil labour statesmen that run the ALP and ACTU.

Thoroughly schooled in the wheeling and dealing of Labor Party politics, even as preparation for administration began CFMEU officials hoped against hope to finagle a deal to avoid outright takeover. National secretary Zach Smith attempted to appease the bloodhounds with whom he shared the high councils of the ALP—throwing the Victorian leadership under a bus by taking over the state branch and pleading them guilty. As Smith spent the weeks before the takeover frantically knocking on the door of Fair Work Commission boss Murray Furlong, pleading to be given the time of day, the government was busy putting its ducks in a row, setting up the machinery for administration. In the meantime, members were kept in line with bogeyman stories of the union being isolated while the bureaucrats dangled the prospects for a fight “eventually.” Workers were kept waiting...waiting...waiting.

Make no mistake, this takeover could have been spiked on day one. A single phone call and tens of thousands of construction workers would have walked off the job to defend the union. This would have inevitably escalated into a broader class battle against a Labor government determined to assure financiers it could bring down the cost of labour in these unsettled times. Equally determined to avoid such a battle, CFMEU officials simply handed over the keys. No strike, no stoppage, nothing.

Having been told to wait for the call, members then demanded to know what the hell happened. So officials moved to organise a one-day strike four days after the takeover to let members blow off steam. This strike could have been an opportunity to launch a rearguard action to turn the situation around by occupying building sites and locking them down with mass pickets until the administrators were sent packing. Instead, construction union

officials served up a smorgasbord of hollow rage against the ALP, a pie-in-the-sky appeal in the bosses' court, and promises of future action in the sweet by-and-by. Members were sent back to work. The union had been put into administration without a shot fired.

A pre-emptive assault

Why did the ruling class strike now with such determination? And how could the leadership give up the fight so easily? Attacks on the union have been stared down and weathered for years—including many of the same spurious allegations today justifying administration. This time, however, the modus operandi of the CFMEU leadership crumbled in the face of resolute commitment by the bosses to crush the union.

Over the past few years, the CFMEU have copped the ire of the bosses who saw the union as a notable exception to the deteriorating working conditions and declining real wages of most workers in Australia. The “Building Bad” hitjob showed several times one delegate saying that this year's Victorian EBA promised such good times in which there would be “not enough Ford Rangers in the fucking country. First-year apprentices are going to get Raptors.” CFMEU workers have been more than willing to fight for their interests, famously even rebelling against their own leaders' COVID lockdown sell-out outside the CFMEU office in Melbourne. Bucking the trend of workers' economic decline was not only immediately unaffordable for profit-hungry developers, it also put the CFMEU and its militant base in a real position to launch a broader working-class fightback for even more.

As discontent in the population simmers over the cost-of-living, health and housing crises, Australian capitalists are anxious about the working class flexing its muscles in the coming period. Striking against the CFMEU was therefore increasingly necessary. It helped that the ruling class had a Labor government in power—their preferred instrument for union busting while keeping the working class as a whole on side. Thus, a pre-emptive assault could be carefully and methodically organised, avoiding any sharp response which could blow up in their face. More than just bringing one union to heel, this attack was calibrated to send a clear warning to the rest of the workers movement to keep their heads down: sit down and shut up—or else. This is the real context of the attack on the CFMEU, and why it meant a throwing down of the gauntlet to the whole working class.

With a clever media campaign, which sought to portray CFMEU workers as a “privileged” minority, the ruling class aimed to turn discontent at a decaying social order into a bludgeon against the union rather than a source of solidarity. By assaulting the union the ruling class drew a clear line, and once the challenge was made, there was no going back. Albanese walked a tightrope, attacking a union which had been a pillar of Labor's base. The ALP were backed by the ACTU bureaucracy, and fought to keep elements of the CFMEU leadership, and of other “left” unions (AMWU, ETU,

etc.) on board or pacified. Construction and Building Unions Superannuation Fund (Cbus) positions, which were made vacant by the administrator, were then awarded to CFMEU and MUA tops like Paddy Crumlin. When administrators marched into their offices they were studded with “unionist” cred: some had history in the union movement (including one ex-CFMEU official); one cynically declared that they would “stand up and fight back.”

But for those leading the attack there was never any question of backing down. Albanese's leaning on and batting for the bosses was abundantly clear, exemplified by collaboration with the Liberal/National Coalition to push through the legislation to put the union under administration without legal recourse. In fact, the ALP posed themselves as tougher on the CFMEU than the Coalition, arguing that the Coalition's union-busting strategy (from the ABCC to de-registration) was weaker and less effective than the ALP's. Much of the ruling class appear to agree.

In times now past, militant language and guerrilla tactics involving the strategic skirting of bourgeois legality could win gains and stave off some attacks. But now things have shifted. At this juncture for Australian capitalism, in which the gutting of the union had become the task of the day, the whole edifice of the CFMEU leadership's union militancy simply collapsed. At its core, the strategy has been to “make capitalism work” for the CFMEU membership, which ultimately amounted to getting the Labor Party into government and exerting pressure on it through a mixture of tough talk, turf wars, factional squabbling, and occasional militancy on the ground.

These officials deeply imbibe the Laborite myth that workers in Australia and their bosses have a shared “national” interest. Their careers have been predicated on attempting to reconcile the irreconcilable interests of proletarians whose lives depend on their ability to sell their labour power, and capitalists whose profits, and hence power, derive from the exploitation of that labour power. In reality this class collaborationism could only lead, in any decisive class showdown, to the subordination of the interests of the working class to the financial parasites who live off the fruits of their labour. This is why, at the critical moment as Albanese brought down the hammer, the CFMEU tops tied the union to him in their desperate attempt to either squirm out of the way or convince him to change his mind and back down—something he and the ruling class would not do.

The whole situation called out desperately for a class-struggle strategy separate from and opposed to the existing leadership's blind alley. The task for those who understood this was to delineate why the CFMEU bureaucracy's strategy was doomed, to concretely counterpose a new path based on the understanding that to defend the union it was necessary to break with the old course. *Red Battler's* intervention into the struggle to defend the CFMEU (reproduced on the following page) fought for just this; any left intervention which did not would end up as

continued on page 12



Bureaucrats' road to defeat

Workers need class-struggle leadership

As the bosses and federal government brought the boot down on construction workers, placing the CFMEU under administration, the struggle to defend the union was sabotaged by a leadership unwilling to wage the class battle necessary to defeat this attack. At each juncture *Red Battler* put forward a program of struggle against this dead-end course. We republish below three leaflets distributed to building workers on job sites and at rallies through August and September.

* * *

Enough waiting!

Fight back and defend the CFMEU!

August 10

It has been weeks since the “Building Bad” media hitjob launched against the CFMEU’s construction division. The Labor government, with the backing of the ACTU, is moving to put the union into external administration. A state-appointed administrator, to be in place for years, will be empowered to sack all elected officials and to seize union assets at will. New and existing CFMEU EBAs are now subject to a Fair Work monitored “special process.” This is the culmination of years of attacks from Royal Commissions to the ABCC—threatening not just legal action against a few union officials but a hostile takeover of the union itself. A CFMEU “under administration” would send a chilling message that any union sticking their neck out could be subjected to a similar fate. This is an outrage! The attack on the CFMEU is an attack on the entire working class and must be defeated—which can only be achieved through class-struggle action against the Labor government.

What has the CFMEU leadership done instead? Victorian Secretary John Setka jumped ship, resigning immediately. The sharpest response has been from Queensland Secretary Michael Ravbar who rebuked Albanese and other “ladder-climbing politicians in the halls of power,” declaring “We will defend each other to the ends of the earth.” Fine words! But the only line of “defence” that the CFMEU leadership has had to offer is National Secretary Zach Smith’s attempt to placate Labor by taking over the Victorian branch in the name of cleaning out “criminal” elements. This course is leading the union to disaster!

It is no secret that the moves against the CFMEU have nothing to do with “stamping out corruption” in the construction industry (developer corruption will continue in spades) but are about crushing a “problem union” which has been able to extract higher wages and better conditions by regularly defying the bosses’ anti-strike laws. The attack on the CFMEU is an attempt by the bosses to gut the union, an effort to cut the “costs of doing business” in increasingly uncertain times. Neither the bosses nor their Labor government are going to be satiated by anything less than that.

Zach Smith’s “investigation” attempts to sidestep a real fight against the government takeover while acceding to the ruling class’s *casus belli*. The CFMEU tops hope to appease the Labor government (which could only succeed if Smith completely guts the union himself) or at best to rely on

challenges in the bosses’ courts (the same ones that have buried the union in tens of millions of dollars in fines for years). The government has already responded to the latter option, promising new laws to frustrate any potential legal challenge from the CFMEU. The union tops’ strategy paralyzes the CFMEU just when a struggle is so desperately needed.

In fact, the CFMEU leadership’s strategy of wheeling and dealing has even led them to oppose public demonstrations of opposition. A recent statement by the Victorian Building Industry Group of Unions (BIG, composed of CFMEU, AMWU, ETU and the plumbers union) denounced a subsequently canned 5 August demonstration in defence of the CFMEU, demanding members not attend. Even the most elementary expressions of defence are stymied in fear of alienating the Labor government and ACTU. Instead, BIG promises that “in due course there will be a joint delegates meeting to discuss the next steps forward.”

By dragging their feet and dangling a fight at some undefined future, the CFMEU leadership keep members waiting...waiting...waiting...preventing any action that would hurt the weak Labor government which they are so attached to. At the end of the day, the CFMEU leadership’s strategy is to support and influence the Labor Party in an effort to “make capitalism work” for its membership. Today, this ties the workers movement to Albanese just as he is bringing down the hammer.

To try and prevent a fightback, the ruling class has attempted to use working-class frustrations as a battering ram against the supposedly “privileged CFMEU.” “Thuggery,” “corruption,” etc. paint a tall tale of CFMEU membership living lavish lifestyles funded by gangsterism and backroom deals at the expense of the taxpayer. But soaring costs of living, the housing crisis, the lack of decent jobs, are the product of a decaying social order which the Labor government defends and administers for. CFMEU officials convey the impression the union is isolated. But waging the struggle as a fight for all working people against the hated Labor government is the only way to rally broader sections of the working class to the CFMEU’s side and repel this attack, putting the ruling class on the back foot and opening the door to a broader fightback.

The entire working class has a vested interest in defending the CFMEU from this attack. A gutted CFMEU would mean ETU, MUA, any union showing hints of

continued on page 12

SEND THE ADMINISTRATORS PACKING!

Shut down all construction sites!

August 25

Albanese has pulled the trigger, sacking hundreds of CFMEU officials and putting the union under the control of government-appointed administrators effective immediately. This is a full-frontal assault on the entire workers movement. This attack can be defeated. It is not too late, but what needs to happen is determined strike action against the bosses and their rotten Labor government.

The CFMEU has called rallies in defence of the union on Tuesday in most capital cities. Good! Not a single site should be working—CFMEU and all construction workers must down tools. But this must be just the start. To send the administrators packing and defeat this takeover, workers

need to make clear that this strike will not end until the government gets its hands off the CFMEU.

Now is the time to strike. Construction workers the country over know that their future is on the line and there needs to be a fight. CFMEU workers must take the lead and make sure that all sites are locked down tight with mass pickets until the union is back in their hands. Key to winning this battle is reaching out to all other workers being beaten down by the same Labor government and extending the struggle to other industries. Make Albo regret ever trying to bat for the bosses. Dare to fight, fight to win! ■

CFMEU members: It’s not over yet

Take matters into your own hands!

September 5

With the Labor government’s administrator taking over the CFMEU, Albanese has spearheaded one of the biggest attacks against the union movement in generations. Hundreds of officials have already been sacked. Any members, delegates or organisers deemed to undermine the administration are to be weeded out, potentially facing up to two years in jail. All union assets, derived from members’ hard-earned dues, have been seized, placed under the control of this tinpot Führer. This is a disaster not only for CFMEU members but for the workers movement as a whole.

How the hell did we get here? Since the Building Bad media hitjob Albanese, with the full backing of the ACTU, signalled his determination to ram through the takeover of the CFMEU. Instead of fighting back, CFMEU head, Zach Smith, greased the skids for his Labor mate Albo—pleading the union guilty by taking over the Victorian branch to clean out “criminal” elements. Other officials promised to wage a struggle to “the ends of the earth.” But workers were kept waiting...waiting...waiting. It was only after officials had handed the keys of the union to Albo’s head kickers in suits that protest rallies

were finally called. This could have been the opportunity for real strike action, to shut down all construction sites and send the administrator packing. Instead, workers were sent back to work, with union officials offering little more than an illusory appeal in the bosses’ courts and more hints of unspecified action in the sweet by-and-by.

Today, building developers are salivating at the prospect of taking back hard-won union conditions. Hanging on to existing gains and turning things around can only happen in opposition to Mr Irving KC and to the old leadership’s strategy that has allowed him to take over the union. It’s clear union officials have no strategy to defeat the administrator. To think otherwise is self-delusion. There is still time to act, but it will have to come from the initiative of the rank and file. It’s your union! Talk to your workmates, find those who, like you, refuse to roll over and die without a fight. **Get organised!** Contact workers at other job sites and come up with a plan to strike back. No more waiting for directions from above. The ball is in your court. One thing is certain. If you don’t fight, you lose! ■

WTF...?

(continued from page 10)

impotent as the existing union leaders it tailed behind.

Where was the left?

A betrayal of such proportions by the CFMEU leadership provided a historic opportunity for the left to demonstrate how to fight for an alternative, revolutionary leadership for the working class in a critical struggle. Unfortunately the record is not good. Different leftists bought into the bosses' story that "criminal infiltration" was the issue. Socialist Alternative (SAlt) stood out in this regard, regurgitating Smith's concerns about serious "criminal conduct." They continually complained that the problem with administration was that it was targeting the union "at least as much for being industrially effective as it is for allegedly harbouring criminal gangs"—as though it might be okay if it just focused on the "criminal infiltration." Having read the legal briefs they did conclude "administration will dramatically weaken the CFMEU's industrial effectiveness." But simultaneously they downplayed the attack's severity and wide-reaching implications. Don't worry too much: "Construction workers still have the potential to shape the outcomes of federal administration through their industrial strength."

Construction workers didn't have the luxury of entertaining such illusions. While SAlt accepted administration as a done deal, these workers, knowing their livelihoods were on the line, twice walked out in their tens of thousands. This forced SAlt to accept that a significant struggle of contending class forces was taking place, one in which the workers understood they had a real stake.

There was clearly equivocation in SAlt's leadership about defending the CFMEU. As part of the "Building Bad" hatchet job, Nine Network eventually found one solitary ex-CFMEU activist, Robbie Cecala, prepared to back the takeover. When this rat was defended on the Unions Australia Facebook page by another former CFMEUer, SAlt cadre Liz Ross rushed to extend her unequivocal "solidarity" to these bosses' stooges.

If SAlt seemed at times unsure of whose side they were on, they left no doubt as to their one abiding loyalty: to the "left" bureaucrats who had just given away the shop. To the degree they commented after administration, it was to invariably praise the sellouts and their spokesmen. The bureaucracy's arse-covering 24-hour rally after the fact was described uncritically



AAP Image/Jono Searle

Brisbane, 27 August. Nationwide construction union strikes and rallies days after takeover offered rearguard opportunity to shut the industry down and send administrator packing. Instead workers were sent back to work with the promise of an appeal in the bosses' courts and future action in the by-and-by.

as a "vital and encouraging first blow." Unsurprisingly SAlt were duly rewarded for this sycophancy by being given key speaking slots in post-administration rallies organised by the officials.

The Revolutionary Communist Organisation (RCO) appear a very different animal, often distinguishing themselves with radical-sounding calls for red revolution. But while sometimes groping in the right direction, for opposition to the union bureaucracy, their inability to delineate from the existing leadership a way forward in the struggle to defend the union left their intervention lifeless and frequently backwards. The RCO declared from the start that "the working class must resolutely oppose any and all attempts by the state to repress, manage, or administer the trade union movement." But in an effort to show how red their red was, their first statement on the attack entirely accepted and foregrounded the bosses' framework of union criminality and a "long standing friendship" of the CFMEU with "underworld figures." Joining the reactionary chorus targeting former leader John Setka, with no basis beyond his Croatian background, the RCO went so far as to accuse the CFMEU leadership of being riddled with "fascist Ustasha sympathisers" and collaborators!

Consistently, the RCO dismissed the severity of the attack on the union movement, equating "ACTU cretinism and Setka-ite gangsterism," as "two sides of the same coin—class collaboration." But to equate the open union-busting ACTU leadership with those being removed to enable a government takeover is to pro-

vide a justification for not taking a side in this naked union-busting. Contradicting this nonchalance, their call for "All out to defend the CFMEU!" ends up an empty slogan, not backed by anything to demonstrate that communists have something to offer the struggle to defend the union.

The conclusion of their first statement was that "the CFMEU remains a conservative, economic trade union which lies in bed with some of the most atavistic layers of the middle bourgeois"—and that "trade unions, absent a militant, class struggle orientation and a communist politics, are simple economic organisations that do not fundamentally threaten the capitalist order." Fine, but these abstract formulations do nothing to motivate why it is necessary to wage a real struggle to defend the union, or to trace a line against the betrayal of that struggle by the CFMEU leadership—the only basis to propagate militant, class-struggle communist politics. Instead, a crude and capitulatory line is drawn on "corruption" and "fascist gangsterism."

The fight for revolutionary leadership is a fight to tear CFMEU militants and others away from their existing "left" leadership by showing how its prostration to the ALP renders it incapable of even effectively defending the unions. The RCO's lack of this perspective was evident in *Partisan!* No. 3's report of the last Queensland rally. Effusive of the keynote speech by SAlt cadre Bec Barrigos, the one criticism offered is that it did not break out of the generalised framework of "economism." But Barrigos put forward not one word of criticism of the union leadership. So it is perhaps not surprising the RCO's report was unable to identify the main problem with the bureaucracy: that their Laborite program of seeking to reconcile the interests of the working class with the Australian bourgeoisie paralyses the necessary struggle against the bourgeoisie, its government, and its attack on the union.

Grasping for a way forward, the RCO correctly calls "For a Red Faction in every union!" However, in an application of their general project of left unity, they describe this simply as: "Socialists, communists, and all those committed to the organised power of the working class must come together to organise rank-and-file committees." This doesn't cut it. If these committees are not based in *the first place* on opposition to the current union misleadership, and to their betrayal of the concrete struggles of today, then they can only become a tool of this same misleadership.

The case in point is the Rank & File: Hands off the CFMEU group (now Defend the Unions—Defend the CFMEU) set up by various leftists including Socialist Alliance and Solidarity. This committee undoubtedly attracted genuine militants

looking to fight the administration, but rather than organise them on the basis of opposition to the tops' disastrous strategy, it has uttered not one direct criticism of the "left" leaders responsible for the takeover. Thus, their first public meeting promoted recently-retired former CFMEU national secretary Christy Cain—an expert at making empty declarations about the need for struggle while amnestying the left Laborite union bureaucracy.

Since then they have become ever more openly a vehicle of the old leadership. Even earlier polite differences with the sacked leadership's High Court appeal have fallen away. In line with this they dissolve the fight for a class-struggle opposition within the union into a "broader campaign" to mobilise "community" opinion in opposition to the takeover.

Their role as handmaidens for "left" officials was seen in their grovelling apology to Victoria's Building Industry Group union leaders when these union tops denounced their planned rally against impending administration back in August. Rather than use this to expose these traitors' fear of upsetting the ALP and ACTU the group rushed to assure these sellouts: "We have heard [your] concerns, and have decided to cancel our planned protest. We do not want to harm the campaign to defend our union, and want unity in action with our officials." The only "action" from these officials before administration was to quash any action!

Solidarity's parent group in Britain, the SWP, are long-versed in setting up "rank and file" groups in the unions. These are only ever conceived of as vehicles to pressure the existing misleadership to the left, or for "progressive" out-bureaucrats to unseat reactionary incumbents. What is really needed in the unions are class-struggle caucuses, linked to a revolutionary party, based on challenging today's sellouts for leadership of the unions on the basis of applying a socialist program tailored to the needs of workers in their particular industries and situations.

One can scream or make solemn admissions all you want about Red factions, Red Armies, Red revolution and so on, as the RCO does. But if you have no strategy to *break* the working class from their left Laborite misleaders, then you are never going to be able to realise these things, and the verbal militancy becomes merely a cover for the lack of such a strategy. This puts you in the same place as SAlt, Solidarity et al., who leave the workers to the tender mercies of the labour traitors who employ their own verbal militancy to cover their treachery.

Rather than disappear the fundamental bureaucratic obstacle to a successful struggle or try to substitute eternal dogmatic formulae for a revolutionary strategy, the SL put forward a concrete path of action flowing from the objective needs of the struggle at each step. Our interventions struck a chord among broad layers of construction militants at different times because, while always guided by the final socialist goal, it was grounded at all times in a materialist appraisal of the shifting balance of contending class forces. Key was the constant perspective to break workers from the death grip of their Laborite misleaders to take the struggle forward.

For CFMEU members the struggle is not over. With the union under the jackboot, the coming period will bring a series of defensive struggles as employers seek to take advantage of the stranglehold to drive down wages and conditions. For the working class to come out on top, every opportunity needs to be seized and turned into a fight against administration, the immediate obstacle to any new victory. But for any struggle to be waged with success, militants, the left, and the whole workers movement must assimilate the lessons of how we got here. ■

Fight back...

(continued from page 11)

combativity in the face of worsening living conditions would now be under threat. The bosses would only have a freer hand to tighten the screws on the whole working class.

Fight back now!

Today the workers movement is at a crossroads. We say: act before it's too late! The Labor government is putting in place machinery to implement the takeover. These moves can only be defeated by mobilising the immense social power of the working class against the bosses. BIG has declared that there will be joint delegates' meetings "in due course." Construction workers must demand their officials put their money where their mouth is and fight to organise meetings immediately, both within and across unions, for the defence of the CFMEU. Over the past few weeks,

there have been scores of CFMEU site meetings in Sydney voting on their EBAs. Picketing workers on the Cross River Rail project in Brisbane are fighting rotten conditions for a better EBA themselves. But the fate of all EBAs and the whole union is on the line right now—these meetings and pickets need to be turned into a platform to organise a defence of the CFMEU against the takeover.

We propose that all CFMEU and construction union members, and workers more broadly, fight for the following motion in their union meetings:

The Labor government's move to take over the CFMEU is an attack on our union and a threat to the union movement as a whole. We need to fight back. To defend the CFMEU we must effectively mobilise unions for a common struggle against the Labor government. The union must send delegated members to fight for this perspective by fraternising with workers of other unions in order to forge the broadest class-struggle defence possible.

Make real the CFMEU slogan "touch one, touch all"! ■

South Africa...

(continued from page 7)

ANC: “You don’t need a coalition government. You need an economic freedom government.” At the same time, Julius Malema and others would trample all over these Pillars to reassure the capitalists they had nothing to fear. When pressed about the backlash over nationalising the banks, Malema promised that the EFF was not planning to go after private banks but only to set up a state bank to peacefully coexist with them.

Throughout the campaign, the more the imperialists increased the pressure, the more EFF leaders retreated from their progressive demands. This was a major factor in the EFF’s loss of electoral support. Much of its voting base opted for the populist MK [Umkhonto weSizwe], seeing its leader Jacob Zuma as more skilled at manoeuvring with monopoly capital. Immediately after the EFF’s disappointing election result came in, Malema made clear that their Pillars were negotiable after all. To stop a coalition with the DA, he appealed to sections of the ANC leadership and black businessmen to stick with the tested option of a coalition of their “relatives”. All this was to no avail. Whatever fear those black elites had of inviting the DA into government, this was nothing compared to the punishment they knew would come from global financial markets if they teamed up with MK and the EFF.

EFF members told us that many people who wanted to support the party were deterred by the threats of “economic doomsday” if the EFF came into power: Look at what happened to the economy in Zimbabwe after the US and Britain turned the screws in retaliation for land seizures. This is an astute observation. What EFF militants must understand is that the EFF’s *own strategy* disarms the masses and leaves them helpless in the face of this blackmail, which the imperialists use time and again to keep their subjects in line. If EFF leaders are not prepared to stick to their own demands, what confidence can workers and the poor have that they would fight imperialist sabotage in order to implement them? None at all.

Why did Malema and Co capitulate in the face of the imperialist blackmail? Because the alternative course—standing up to the threats and insisting on the demands needed for national liberation and socio-economic development—required preparing the masses for a serious confrontation with imperialism. This is totally incompatible with the EFF tops’ parliamentary strategy of wooing the black elites who, despite being suffocated by white capital, are bound to those same monopolists. Any wish that aspiring black capitalists have of pushing back against imperialism is overwhelmed by their fear of black workers fighting the imperialists with class-struggle methods, which would threaten their own privileged position.

The EFF is now in crisis, with Floyd Shivambu and others decamping to MK. The elections showed a real growth in popularity for MK. This is not good news for the black masses. Alongside progressive demands like nationalising the land, Zuma’s party pushes anti-immigrant, anti-woman chauvinism, tribalism and other reactionary appeals. In so doing, MK divides the working class, weakening its ability to fight white monopoly capital.

In fact, an ANC-MK-EFF coalition would have come *at the expense* of the black masses. It would have been brokered by betraying the EFF’s core demands and repackaging the ruling Alliance whose policies have proven so disastrous over the past 30 years, epitomised by the massacre of Marikana mineworkers when Zuma was president. Contrary to Floyd Shivambu’s claim that his move to MK will help unite the progressive forces, Zuma and Co are fundamentally incapable of uniting the masses against imperialism because they

are bound hand and foot to capital.

EFF leftists who reject that course must draw the correct lessons. It’s time to break with the strategy of unity with black elites and to chart a completely different course, one that joins the cause of national liberation with the class struggle. That requires the *political independence* of the proletariat from the nationalists and all bourgeois forces. This can only be accomplished through breaking workers from the trade-union bureaucrats and all opportunists in the workers movement, who each in their own ways leave the nationalists at the head of the liberation struggle.

NUMSA’s betrayal

At the moment, class struggle is at an ebb. Workers are hesitant to go on strike, worried about risking their jobs as the unemployment rate, already the world’s second highest, continues to rise. And now they face a neoliberal barrage from the GNU. The real guilty party in this crime scene are trade-union leaders, including the “Communists” who head NUMSA.

Responding to Mapaila’s lambasting the ANC for allying with the DA, NUMSA president Andrew Chirwa wrote that this confirmed the correctness of NUMSA’s decision after Marikana “to stop voting and campaigning for the ANC because we knew it would fail to transform the lives of the majority of people” (*Sunday Times*, 8 September). Very well. But this just begs the question: What have they been *doing* to actually build a working-class pole to lead the struggle for the Freedom Charter and other demands betrayed by the ANC? Surely, if the leaders of one of the largest and most powerful unions on the continent had been seriously struggling for this correct perspective, we wouldn’t be in this mess today.

Far from fighting for a working-class political pole, in this year’s elections the NUMSA tops did not even oppose voting for the ANC! And when it came time to form a government, their response was the same as Malema’s: an ANC-MK-EFF coalition. One NUMSA spokesperson even applauds Shivambu’s move to MK, promoting the lie that uniting under Zuma’s political umbrella is the way to fight imperialism.

While the NUMSA tops can denounce the nationalist elites in the abstract, their actual policy is totally *counterposed* to fighting for a political break with them. This is why the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party launched by NUMSA in 2019 was stillborn. The NUMSA leadership could not explain even to pro-communist workers why they should support a much smaller and less influential party when its demands, strategy and proposed course of action were basically no different from the EFF’s. Instead, their main response to the EFF’s growing political influence among workers is crass sectarianism, like refusing to join the EFF’s March 2023 national shutdown against load shedding. Such idiocies only reinforce the nationalists’ political hegemony, while fueling hostility to the unions among the unemployed masses.

The NUMSA leaders have shown in practice that they do not counterpose a revolutionary proletarian programme to the petty-bourgeois nationalists. The task for NUMSA militants is to build a revolutionary opposition that fights for a different leadership and a different course for the union: one of competing with the nationalists for proletarian leadership of the liberation struggle.

The fight for revolutionary leadership

The same goes for the COSATU unions, whose leaders prop up the GNU, and the SAFTU federation [South African Federation of Trade Unions] under Vavi, who strikes a pose of working-class independence. Vavi’s “independence” is that of the

Defend Xolani Khoza!

We reprint below a statement published in AmaBolsheviki Amnyama No. 2 on 24 November. Khoza appeared in court on 9 December. His trial was postponed again until 7 February.

Everyone in the cross-hairs of the neoliberal ANC-DA government has an urgent interest in mobilising to defend EFF militant Xolani Gregory Khoza. Khoza is facing charges of incitement to commit terrorism, public violence and intimidation. His “crime”? Posting a TikTok video calling for a shutdown to protest the so-called Government of National Unity. Xolani was targeted by the state after he played a leading role in a SACCAWU strike in Mbombela in May.

Trade unionists, land rights activists, civic organisations, radical nationalists, socialists: This is an attack on all of us. Xolani’s persecution is a blatant assault on freedom of speech which threatens to brand any who would resist the attacks of the GNU as “terrorists”. We must not let our political differences stand in the way of uniting to fight this! On 2 and 27 September, Spartacist/South Africa and EFF Ward 29, Enhlanzeni, brought out dozens for a united-front protest outside the Mbombela courthouse where Xolani appeared for trial. Now we must build

on this to pull together far broader forces to defend him when he is due in court again on 9 December. **Drop all charges now!**

To see how this pro-imperialist government is going to crack down on dissent, just look at the killing of EFF councillor Moshe Mphahlele by cops and security guards repressing a service delivery protest on 4 August in Alex. Don’t let them silence Xolani, or they will come for all of us next!

Xolani was charged under the apartheid-era Riotous Assemblies Act of 1965 and the Cybercrimes Act of 2020. While he was released on bail, the conditions include muzzling him with a social media ban. This shows that despite the bourgeois media hype, the white rulers know very well that neo-apartheid South Africa is a tinderbox and the guise of “national unity” is extremely fragile. **End the social media ban and state surveillance!**

What the ruling class really fears is that mass struggle, particularly by the black proletariat, can challenge the GNU’s pro-imperialist agenda. That makes defending Xolani a necessary first step in organising the trade unions, black masses and all the oppressed to **fight back!**

workerist trend in the 1980s, which *counterposed* class struggle to the fight for national liberation. Like the NUMSA tops, Vavi and his followers leave the freedom struggle in the hands of nationalists who inevitably undermine and sabotage it. The real difference between the two is that Vavi doesn’t pose as a communist. He and his SAFTU cohorts showed their true colours when they announced after Ramaphosa’s speech opening parliament that they “welcome the three strategic priorities of the Government of National Unity”!

Left groups like Workers and Socialist Party (WASP) and Marxist Workers Party (MWP) will of course criticise and complain about it when Vavi’s clique capitulates so crassly. But they reject the necessary step from left-criticism to revolutionary action: fighting to replace the existing bureaucracy with a class-struggle leadership in order to change SAFTU’s course. Indeed, they function as one of the main props of Vavi and his allies, promoting them as more “progressive” and “left” than the NUMSA tops.

At bottom, the reason for this rotten course is also the reason why these groups stood on the sidelines in the elections, simply ignoring or denouncing the EFF’s campaign. It’s the reason why they can’t deal with the illusions that workers and youth have in the EFF’s left nationalist programme, instead dismissing these illusions. It’s because they see the struggle against national oppression and imperialism as a *diversion* from the class struggle, and not as pivotal for workers revolution. As a result, they are utterly incapable of conducting a genuine fight for working-class political independence, which requires fighting for communist leadership of the liberation movement in order to fuse the national and class struggles.

This has left them disoriented and unable to chart a course to confront the obstacles to class struggle against the GNU. In the aftermath of the elections, they crowed that the massive setback for the ANC and EFF means that the nationalists have been discredited and the way is open for class struggle. All that revolutionaries had to do to unite the different struggles of the oppressed was simply denounce the nationalists’ past betrayals while preaching the need for an independent workers party and

socialist revolution. A few months on, this campaign is going nowhere, and they are back to the perennial waiting game of hoping Vavi will give the go-ahead to launch a workers party.

The whole history of the anti-apartheid movement shows that if Marxists do not actively compete with the nationalists for leadership of the liberation struggle, the nationalists’ hegemony will be strengthened when the masses rise up (see “For National Liberation and Black Proletarian Power!”, ABA No. 1, October 2023). Yet that refusal precisely defines the WASP and MWP campaigns for a “mass workers party”.

Enough! Instead of *repeating* the mistakes that have led to the left’s current hapless state, it is time to *learn from* them and *change course*. This requires open and thorough political debate, including confronting the reasons why the Marxist left proved bankrupt to fight liberal triumphalism in the decades after counterrevolution in the Soviet Union. In South Africa, this meant being unable to advance a revolutionary course of struggle against GEAR and other neoliberal attacks, which conditioned the inability after Marikana to answer the EFF and build a class-struggle pole.

We know from our own experience that this is not easy (see “Why the ICL Collapsed & How We Reforged It”, *Spartacist* No. 68, September 2023; or “Spartacist/South Africa Refounded!”, ABA No. 1). But those who take this road can play a crucial role in the struggles to come. In a polemic addressing the current crisis in International Socialist Alternative (which WASP is a section of), our comrades in the Spartacist League/U.S. stressed that this is not an isolated incident but a symptom of the political crisis shaking the entire international Marxist left. It is possible to emerge stronger. For those who want to fight, we propose opening a frank and comradely discussion over revolutionary perspectives in the current period:

“Only patient and principled debates between tendencies can put a stop to constant disintegration of revolutionary forces and lead to advances in reforging a true World Party of Socialist Revolution.”

—“The Roots of the ISA Crisis”,

Workers Vanguard No. 1182

(September 2024) ■

Hawke...

(continued from page 4)

ing the Accords represented an existential threat to the Labor government. They could not simply ignore and accede to a “rogue union” acting outside the Accords. For both parties it was do or die. Openly defying the bourgeoisie, without any intention or plan to defeat them, meant Gallagher’s strategy was not only doomed but an adventure which gave the ruling class an avenue to crush the union.

What was required was not a return to the BLF’s Laborite militancy but a *break from it*—to demonstrate this to the working class was the key task of revolutionary leadership. It was only through exposing how Hawke and Keating’s Accords were crucial to resolving the crisis of Australian capitalism, that Gallagher’s futile attempts to be an “exception” could be laid bare. Furthermore, to break from the isolation that the BLF faced, they needed to tap into the widespread sympathy of the broader layers of the working class. Defending workers’ jobs and conditions from encroaching attacks, let alone winning new gains meant going directly up against the interests of the ruling class; not reminiscing about the protectionism of yesteryear but confronting the whole neoliberal reorganisation underway. What needed to be put forward was a program to reorganise the economy *in the interests of the proletariat* that could defend, expand and *modernise* the productive forces of Australia’s industries. This could only be realised through the expropriation, collectivisation and planning of industry under working-class rule, which, in turn could only come about through a social overturn of capitalist property relations.

Failure of the left

Defending the BLF required demonstrating to the working class the bankruptcy of not just Hawke and Keating but the union bureaucracy as a whole—especially that of the BLF. However, the left failed on all counts. From the beginning most socialist groups from the CPA, to the predecessors of today’s Socialist Alternative, Solidarity, Socialist Equality Party and Socialist Alliance tailed Hawke and applauded his successful bid for government. These groups avidly clung to the “left” union bureaucrats, even as they corralled the working class behind Hawke’s Accords. If they didn’t follow key elements of the CPA in *supporting* the smashing of the BLF, many left groups *tailed* Gallagher’s guerrilla strategy to the very end. These groups argued for greater militancy and for other unions to defend the BLF and defy the Accords. But unable to put forward a *political* strategy for victory counterposed to the BLF leadership, their defence of the BLF amounted to little more than sidestepping the necessary class-wide fight against the bosses. If realised their strategy could only have *emboldened* the government in its crackdown.

Others who denounced the Hawke/Keating regime and all wings of the union bureaucracy were still unable to trace a path forwards for the working class and motivate a break with its Laborite misleaders. This camp included the SL/A’s predecessor, the SL/ANZ. While the SL/ANZ was correct to denounce the Labor government and their union brethren, it was unable to expose their bankruptcy or fight to break workers from these Laborite chains. Take for instance the Accords. The SL/ANZ savagely denounced them but its criticisms didn’t go beyond abstractly excoriating class collaboration and Laborism while sloganeering for revolution. What the SL/ANZ didn’t do was take on the bureaucrats’ political justifications for the Accords and their central purpose in resolving the crisis of Australian capitalism. Hence, the SL/ANZ was unable to effectively challenge the union bureaucracy



Peter Henderson/The Age

Hawke/Keating government smashed pilots’ union in service of Accords.

and the arguments they used to shackle the proletariat to the Hawke/Keating government. It never once took on the government’s blackmail and was reduced to shrill denunciations and criticisms abstracted from the ongoing struggles.

The attack on the BLF highlighted this. It was imperative for revolutionaries to take on the BLF leadership’s guerrilla tactics and expose their futility. The BLF tops were widely known as Maoists. Despite that left posture, they were not looking to defeat the Accords (let alone the ruling class!), but to be a successful outlier in an otherwise strangled labour movement. The SL/ANZ, who had a small BLF fraction on the ground, were correct in attempting to address these questions. These militants waged some principled struggles to defend the union, including when the bureaucrats were throwing in the towel. They were also correct to emphasise the need for an industry-wide and even class-wide fight to defend the BLF and bust the Accords.

But to break BLF members from their support to Gallagher’s old-school Laborite militancy required proving that a return to the ’70s era class stalemate could not be tolerated by the bosses. The preceding period was one of crisis, which left Laborite militancy only deepened. By the ’80s such militancy meant putting yourself up against the core interests of the ruling class. The BLF leadership’s fatuous perspective that they could be successful going it alone against the Accords, instead of fighting for class-wide action to smash them and take on the ruling class, was not only doomed from the get-go but set the union up for complete destruction.

For a class-wide fight to succeed it was necessary to win over workers outside the BLF—especially those in the BWIU whose leadership was spearheading the destruction of the BLF by joining Hawke and Keating’s witchhunt and poaching members. Winning these workers required driving a wedge between the working-class base and the pro-Accord tops of the unions, politically taking on the Accords and the blackmail which kept large numbers of workers tied to their leadership and the Hawke/Keating program. What needed to be put forward was a counterposed political solution, *a workers’ reorganisation of the country* under a planned economy which would build up and modernise Australia’s crumbling industries. Such a perspective could also have won broad layers of disgruntled and increasingly impoverished workers (those who were beginning to abandon Labor

and the unions in droves) and direct their frustrations in a progressive direction against the Accords and in defence of the BLF and union movement as a whole.

Instead, the SL/ANZ responded to Hawke and Keating’s reforms with timeless formulas about the bankruptcy of Laborism, not once taking on the fundamental arguments which kept workers in thrall to the Labor government. In fact, following the election of Hawke, the SL/ANZ attempted to explain away working-class allegiance to Labor with apocryphal references to the Australian proletariat’s “national character” as being hopelessly racist and Laborite. This included going so far as to argue that “shattering the insular chauvinist complacency of this remote island continent” and breaking workers from Laborism rested solely on external shocks such as “the military defeat and humiliation of the Australian ruling class in a counterrevolutionary war in Asia or economic catastrophe” (“Against White Australia ‘Socialism’” *ASp* No. 104, Summer 1983/84).

The fight for revolution became not one of leadership but a waiting game for better objective circumstances.

It was in this arid framework that the SL/ANZ substituted the necessary head-on argument against the Accords with empty denunciations of Laborite anti-Sovietism. Of course, it was imperative to fight against the US-led anti-Soviet war drive as an integral part of advancing the workers movement in Australia. But abstractly grafting such denunciations onto the unfolding struggle on the Australian terrain amounted to moral preaching about defending the Soviet Union. Ironically, substituting the necessary arguments against the Accords with empty denunciations of the anti-Soviet war drive weakened the SL/ANZ’s capacity to break the working class from their misleaders, many of whom supported the Hawke-backed US-led war drive. Ultimately, in spite of all the turmoil and division within the workers movement, in the absence of a revolutionary pole, the proletariat remained wedded to its Laborite leadership. This not only led to the BLF being smashed but gave the Labor government impetus to continue its “shock therapy” and restructure the economy in the bosses’ interests.

The result was catastrophic. In the years following the deregistration of the BLF, the Labor government continued to turn the screws on the working class while facing less and less resistance. By 1991, in the face of double-digit unemployment and interest rates—the worst recession since the Great Depression—Keating could nonchalantly declare that this was “a recession that Australia had to have.” Such a statement made by a Labor prime minister only 20 years earlier would have meant all hell breaking loose. However, as a testament to the weakened state of the labour movement these comments were met without protest. Hawke and Keating lorded over not just the corpse of the BLF (and later the pilots’ union) but a workers movement in stranglehold. By the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the balance of class forces, both in Australia and internationally, had shifted decisively in favour of imperialism.

Australia’s liberal order and its ruin

The US-led imperialist victory over the Soviet Union was a dream come true for the Australian ruling class. It had long hitched its wagon to the American Empire, which was now not just the premier imperialist power but the unchal-

lenged hegemon over the entire world. In Australia, this compounded the already historic defeats suffered under the Labor government and their union bureaucracy.

Now under a hegemonic US-led world order, Australian capitalism’s strategy became to extend and entrench this order at home and abroad. The ideological justification was one of liberal triumphalism: that the “end of history” had been reached and that liberal capitalism was the only road forwards. This ideology was embraced and promoted by the Labor government and the union bureaucracy. Internationally, under now prime minister Keating, Australian capitalism pushed to “enmesh” with Asia: i.e., to foster economic liberalisation for the purpose of deepening imperialist penetration throughout the region. Thus, the Labor government was in the forefront of championing the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum which promoted greater free trade in Southeast Asia under American auspices.

Domestically, Keating made it clear that the only good union was one that totally submitted to government diktats and embraced the “national interest” of Australia’s liberal order. By late 1991 he was able, without opposition, to introduce a system of enterprise bargaining which buttressed the Accords and increased productivity (read exploitation) by outlawing industry-wide struggles. During this period, Keating embarked on a mass union-busting privatisation spree—selling off Qantas, the Commonwealth Bank, the Commonwealth Serum Laboratories, Australian National Lines etc. These formerly public companies were gleefully snapped up at fire sale prices by gigantic, predominantly US-run investment and asset funds.

The result of Hawke and Keating’s reforms wasn’t the “modernisation of Australia’s industry” or to “get manufacturing going” but a further brake on the development of Australia’s productive forces, a decline in its industrial capacity and an overall hollowing out of what became an increasingly parasitic economy. Becoming little more than a “quarry with a view,” the Australian economy increasingly intertwined itself with, and relied on the success of, American finance capital. American capital became dominant over many Australian companies and banks. In turn, Australia’s limited investment capacities, if they were not outright funnelled back into Wall Street, were coupled with American investments overseas. It was through this that Australian capitalism’s *rentier* nature was deepened and a growing seal of parasitism was set on the whole country. The only thing that prevented Australian capitalism from completely falling into this abyss was the mining industry, which by that time was beginning to rapidly expand. But even this was reliant on the success of American finance capital and its penetration into China.

While Hawke and Keating’s measures afforded the Australian liberal order relative prosperity for thirty years, the ultimate result has been a significantly more hollowed out and vulnerable economy built on a foundation of sand. Today, Australian capitalism again approaches crisis. To keep itself afloat the ruling class needs to join with its American big brother in tearing down the very liberal order they had built and prospered from (see “Australia at a crossroads,” page 1). It is imperative to assimilate the lessons of how we got here and why the left and organised working class is a shell of its former self in order to rebuild anew. When once again crisis reaches Australia’s shores, the question will be posed: will it be resolved in the interests of the capitalists or the proletariat? For the latter to succeed what is required is a ruthless struggle to break the working class from all wings of the Laborite misleadership that has brought the workers movement to its decrepit present-day state. ■

IBT debate...

(continued from page 6)

fight for revolutionary leadership today. This debate was one of a number that have taken place between the ICL and other organisations, aiming to further political and programmatic clarification and regroupment of the forces of international revolution, today minuscule and isolated. We print below the SL/A's presentation at the debate, edited for publication. The full debate and discussion can be viewed on the *Red Battler* YouTube channel.

* * *

Hello comrades. Permanent revolution and the fight for revolutionary leadership today. This question is not an academic one, not one of theoretical differences in abstract understanding of the theory of permanent revolution. No. At its core, this debate is between two fundamentally opposed methods. There is one, the IBT's, that sees the world through the lens of sterile formulas and dogmas. The IBT proudly stakes its claim on all that is sterile, reactionary and counter to Leninism in historic Spartacism's distortion of permanent revolution. Then there is our own, orientated by the fight to *advance the class struggle through the struggle against imperialism*.

Both groups proclaim the need for revolution, but unlike the IBT we actually forge a path to put those words into action. In this presentation I will demonstrate what the fight for revolutionary leadership actually entails and why the IBT fails to wage a fight and is in fact a roadblock to this struggle in general but especially in the neocolonies.

The world order today—the tasks at hand

Today, the imperialist hegemony of the US is in decline. The American Empire has responded hysterically by holding ever tighter to its position and eyeing any potential threats, from Russia in Ukraine to China through the AUKUS military pact. In part motivated by weakened US hegemony and in reaction to years of brutal siege on Palestinians, Hamas attempted to draw neighbouring states into war. Another crack in the US-led world order, the reaction has been the holding on ever tighter to their Zionist enclave in the Middle East as it rolls through and bombs Gaza. The US is looking to drag the workers of the world down with it in a spiral of war and destruction. And the world over, the workers movement has been completely tied to this course by its bourgeois misleaders.

In this decline, the US is squeezing its allies and clients. Nowhere is this more acutely felt than in the neocolonies. These countries have been defined by imperialist oppression, which has plunged the working class into the depths of misery. Austerity is dictated through imperialist debts. The backwardness of pre-capitalist relations that denied peasants land and bread are maintained and reinforced by foreign domination. Under “globalised” imperialist hegemony the massively growing proletariat of the neocolonies are kept superexploited and in a stagnating social position. It is here that the workers and toilers yearn to modernise and resist the deplorable conditions enforced by the imperialists, giving an explosive dynamic to the struggle for the most basic demands and propelling the working class to its feet.

This felt sense of imperialist oppression has thus far been channelled into support to bourgeois nationalists, from AMLO in Mexico to Modi in India, who claim that they represent the interests of the nation and pose as progressive or modernising forces in developing the country—capable of uplifting the masses from the conditions enforced by imperialism.

They are the representatives of the national bourgeoisie of the neocolonial



Viktor Bulla

Lenin addressing Second Comintern Congress, 1920. “Theses on the National and Colonial Questions” mandated a fight for communist leadership of the national liberation movement.

countries, what Trotsky described as a semi-ruling, semi-oppressed class veering between foreign finance capital and the national proletariat. As a propertied class, they are perennially in fear of the independent mobilisation of the proletariat, the only class with the capacity to fight and ultimately defeat imperialism. For all their rhetoric about defending the nation, under their leadership there is neither national nor social emancipation. AMLO, Modi, Lula, etc. only offer dead ends for the working class, and offer no solutions to escape the trajectory of misery and imperialist carnage. The question is, what way forwards?

What way forwards?

Over the past decades, there have been two reactions on the left to the seemingly unbreakable grip that the bourgeois nationalists have over the neocolonial masses, both of which surrender the fight for proletarian leadership.

On the one hand, there are those who tail the bourgeois nationalists as a progressive force—openly repudiating the necessity of independent revolutionary leadership, or at least postponing it to an indefinite future. A classic example were the Pabloites who saw the nationalists not as an obstacle but as a “blunt instrument” against imperialism. There are countless contemporary iterations of these politics today each of which cheers on, or plays left critic-advisers to, bourgeois nationalism as it leads the working class into betrayal after betrayal and defeat after defeat. One example is how much of the left cynically fawns over Hamas, promoting the movement under their leadership as the path to Palestinian liberation.

Against such flagrant opportunism there are those who, in the name of proletarian leadership, drew sterile and rigid lines against the national liberation struggle, juxtaposing national liberation with socialism. In this camp stood the old ICL, and stands the current IBT, who often denounce the struggle for national liberation as bourgeois in itself or otherwise a barrier to class struggle. Under this schema national liberation is not something to champion but to remove from the agenda. But this only leaves the national liberation struggle firmly in the hands of the bourgeois nationalists.

The former trend amounts to “competing” with the national bourgeois by matching it with nationalist sloganeering, that is, to tail and cheer them on. The latter denounces the struggle to compete at all. Both are a roadblock. What is really necessary is to *fight for communist leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle*. This is the core of permanent revolution, and its strength.

As the Comintern's Theses on the Eastern Question outlined in 1922, our duty

is to demonstrate that even the smallest day-to-day struggles of the working class must be directed at imperialism to permit any real victories. Even in the struggle for the most basic democratic tasks we must fight to guide the workers to the question of class power.

At every step we must expose these nationalists and their program of conciliation to the imperialists as incapable of achieving even their own limited demands, let alone the broader democratic and national tasks necessary to achieve national emancipation! Our task is to push forward the struggle against the imperialists, to counterpose our strategy of independent action of the working class against the ones of the national bourgeoisie, and show that in fact they constitute the main political roadblock to a victorious struggle against imperialism.

In fact, by *advancing* each struggle against the imperialists, by bringing the masses to their feet, we do not push the working class closer to the national bourgeoisie but deepen the polarisation between the two classes. As the struggle against imperialism is pushed to its limits, torn asunder is the nationalist lie of a common interest between the two classes against imperialism. Only through this can we destroy the nationalist illusions that have a stranglehold over the masses.

This cannot be done through endless pontification of Marxist-sounding formulas but by actively participating in the anti-imperialist struggle and fighting for a communist program within it, and for communist hegemony over it. Only through actively intervening and championing the movement for democracy and national independence against imperialism can the proletariat take leadership and come to power, the only thing that can ensure resolution of these fundamental questions. *This* is what it means to fight for revolutionary leadership of the working class of the neocolonies. Not, as the ICL has

previously done and the IBT does today, abstractly juxtaposing the dictatorship of the proletariat against the real daily needs and aspirations of the masses. As Trotsky said in reference to Mexico:

“...the Fourth International recognizes all the democratic tasks of the state in the fight for national independence, but the Mexican section of the Fourth International is in competition with the national bourgeoisie before the workers, before the peasants. We are in permanent competition with the national bourgeoisie as the only one leadership which is capable of assuring the victory of the masses in the fight against the foreign imperialists.

“In the agrarian question we support the expropriations. That does not signify, of course, that we support the national bourgeoisie. In every case where it is a direct fight against the foreign imperialists or their reactionary fascist agents, we give revolutionary support, preserving the full political independence of our organization, of our program, of our party, and the full freedom of our criticism.”

—“Latin American Problems:
A Transcript” (4 November 1938)

IBT's method and the Marxist method

In response to this Trotsky quote the IBT will say they agree with him, that they too would have supported the expropriation of imperialist assets in Latin America. In doing so, what they will miss is the forest for the trees. That is, they miss that Trotsky's method *centres the fight for revolutionary leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle*. Of course we support the expropriation of imperialist assets. But this narrow view of whether something is “supportable” or not supportable misses the *basis* of Trotsky's support. The very thing that it is trying to accomplish—fighting to show that communists are the best and most consistent fighters against foreign imperialists—is something the IBT denounces us for.

For the IBT and the old ICL, Marxism is not a guide to action, but little more than a grab bag of formulas to wave around at the end of articles to ward off opportunism. The struggles and works of Lenin and Trotsky; hell, all the lessons of the Russian Revolution as codified in the first four congresses of the Comintern; are not so much distilled but sterilised into abstract principles to use at any occasion. Such cross-reference “Marxism” teaches you not how to navigate the waters of class struggle, but to stay on land to avoid drowning.

It is no surprise that when we actually laid out a program for revolutionary leadership in the neocolonies in *Spartacist* No. 68, against our old sterility, the IBT has only been able to cry out “opportunism!” At best they declare we have crossed some imagined line of opportunism, at worse they distort our position beyond recognition. Not once do they motivate how their own program advances the fight for revolutionary leadership and ours does not. To be fair, I wouldn't know how to argue on this basis against the ICL's program either!

In their article “Spartacism Junked,” to argue that we are now orientating to

**Spartacist (English edition)
No. 68, September 2023**

A\$4.00

SPARTACIST

**THE BREAKDOWN OF
U.S. HEGEMONY
&
THE STRUGGLE FOR
WORKERS POWER**

Order from/pay to: Spartacist ANZ Publishing Company
PO Box 967, North Melbourne Vic 3051

icli.org/spartacist/en/68/permrev

bourgeois nationalism, they pull from us a quote criticising our old position as opposition to “bourgeois nationalism in oppressed nations based on sectarian class purity.” With such a statement they seemingly imply we now *support* bourgeois nationalism. But what they neglect to quote is the second half of that sentence, which says that the old ICL method “opposes bourgeois nationalism in oppressed nations based on sectarian class purity *instead of seeking to break its hold on the masses by showing how it is an obstacle to both social and national liberation*” (our emphasis). In fact, the full quote is a pretty apt summary of the difference between the ICL and IBT. Two fundamentally opposed methods to break the hold of bourgeois nationalism, only one of which is actually capable of doing so.

The actual basis of their opposition to our struggle really is reflected in their repeated assertion that we champion the national liberation struggle *instead* of class struggle as the fundamental lever of revolution in the neocolonies. Their method of reaching this conclusion is simple: Trotsky says we need a dictatorship of the proletariat to overthrow the imperialist yoke in the neocolonies. Thus, what is needed is revolution. Revolution can only be achieved through class struggle. Thus, we just need to preach for class struggle and revolution, to criticise the nationalist leadership, not on the basis of their ability to actually wage this struggle but on the basis that they are not revolutionary and aren’t for class struggle.

Such methods are very easy for those who would not like to think. But can we be real? People who support AMLO and Modi already know that they aren’t revolutionaries. Such an argument convinces them of nothing, other than the fact that these would-be Marxists have nothing to offer the national liberation movement of *today*.

What are the implications of juxtaposing class struggle and national liberation? The world today is defined by a handful of imperialist countries dividing up and dominating the rest of the world through the export of finance capital. In Lenin’s words, our current epoch is defined by imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism. To think that in this situation, the anti-imperialist struggle is *not* key to liberation, that the struggle against imperialism is in any way *separated* from the struggle against capitalism, is to renounce the Leninist understanding of capitalism altogether.

The difference between ourselves and the IBT is not that we see class struggle or the struggle against capitalism as subordinate to a struggle against imperialism. Our difference is that the IBT puts one against the other. The IBT treats the goal of national emancipation not as intimately connected with social emancipation but as a diversion from class struggle, something to strike off the agenda to focus on some



imagined “pure” class struggle untainted by the pesky reality of imperialist oppression. Or, as is said in IBT’s favourite “old Spartacist” article, the 1977 Theses on Ireland: “We support the right of self-determination and national liberation struggles in order to remove the national question from the historic agenda, not to create another such question.” That is bankruptcy to the highest degree. As Lenin argued against those who dismissed the struggle against the British in the Dublin Easter rebellion in 1916:

“To imagine that social revolution is *conceivable* without revolts by small nations in the colonies and in Europe, without revolutionary outbursts by a section of the petty bourgeoisie *with all its prejudices*, without a movement of the politically non-conscious proletariat and semi-proletarian masses against oppression by the landowners, the church, and the monarchy, against national oppression, etc.—to imagine all this is to *repudiate social revolution*. So one army lines up in one place and says, ‘We are for socialism’, and another, somewhere else and says, ‘We are for imperialism’, and that will be a social revolution! Only those who hold such a ridiculously pedantic view could vilify the Irish rebellion...”

—“The Discussion of Self-Determination Summed Up” (July 1916)

There lies our difference. In place of an actual argument, their “Spartacism Junked” article can only call out and decry us as Pabloites. Our crime? Fighting for national liberation as key to revolution in the neocolonies. The Fourth International was liquidated by the rise of Pabloism because it was a political tendency which represented, at its core, an open repudiation of the necessity of revolutionary leadership. But the IBT transforms the whole struggle against Pabloism into a caricature. For them the fundamental problem with Pabloism is that it championed national

liberation. For the doctrinaire, repudiating the fight for revolutionary leadership is a secondary question.

The IBT’s decrying of our defence of the anti-imperialist united front is premised on the same distortion of Leninism. In the fight for revolutionary leadership against imperialism, we must seek to find every avenue to expose the bourgeois nationalists for their betrayals. That includes united fronts. To paraphrase Trotsky: it is necessary to reach episodic agreements with the bourgeois nationalists within the framework of strictly defined practical tasks while maintaining complete political independence.

This perhaps is not the case for the IBT, but communists use the united front not to just cohere broader forces for a common purpose in itself but also to struggle for communist hegemony within this united front. This does not mean we are entering permanent blocs with the national bourgeoisie as the IBT implies. Even the IBT seemingly understand the necessity of this anti-imperialist united front in certain situations—after all, do they not take a military side with Hamas against Israel?

Again, for the IBT they see capitulation and opportunism not in the failure to fight for revolutionary leadership, but in crossing of imagined principles—to accomplish this they resort to distorting the Fourth Congress of the Comintern which this call derives from.

The ICL’s position on the anti-imperialist united front, and on the anti-imperialist struggle as a whole, was not invented by us. Our framework on the anti-imperialist struggle is based on the Second and Fourth Congresses of the Comintern. I ask the IBT—do you stand on the Second and Fourth Congresses, or do you denounce it just like the old ICL did?

The junk IBT peddles

In criticising what they call our “junking” of Spartacism the IBT declares we have thrown “the baby out with the bathwater,” in their words:

“The SL was distinguished from the Pabloites on a range of important political questions, from Northern Ireland to Israel/Palestine, from the Iranian Revolution to the Malvinas/Falklands War, from Mexico to Quebec and beyond. All of that has now been erased.”

From Mexico to Palestine, the IBT cries that we dropped everything Spartacist. But really we have only junked the junk, which the IBT still desperately clings on to. Take a look at Mexico for instance, a country whose entire history is defined by imperialist bondage and devastation. The NAFTA trade agreement opened today’s era of unrestricted pillaging. The IMF imposes the harshest austerity measures on Mexico in the interests of US imperialism. US companies are the direct employers of most of the workers. Imperialism dictates every single political and economic aspect of Mexico, and the whole struggle of the Mexican people has been resistance to such imperialist oppression.

In response to this, the ICL argued in 2000 “We Spartacists insist that in Mexico the main enemy is at home: it is the Mexican bourgeoisie, lackey of imperialism!” We insisted that the main enemy is not imperialism *in Mexico*. This is a reiteration of earlier articles that the IBT upholds such as 1972’s “Not Green Against Orange, but Class Against Class!” which declares that “...the main battle of workers in one nation must always be against their own bourgeoisie.” So the “main enemy” isn’t the one actually calling their shots, but the national bourgeoisie—a class which in reality is at best a local branch manager administering imperialist dictates.

We later repudiated the “main enemy is at home” slogan in Mexico but still

approached each question from the basis of some “pure” class struggle against the Mexican bourgeoisie, *not* by using the struggle against imperialism to expose its national lackeys. This is what the GEM, Mexican section of the ICL repudiated. Today, we actually have a program to expose the bourgeois nationalists as nothing but an obstacle to national liberation.

So what does the IBT oppose? That we say the main enemy is imperialism? That we say that the struggle against imperialism is key to liberation? That we criticise the nationalists for betraying the struggle against imperialism?

This is not isolated to Mexico of course but look around at Asia and the Pacific. How the hell are you going to win any workers from Indonesia, Kanaky, Papua New Guinea if you argue that the main enemy is not imperialism but that, in fact, in the neocolonies the main enemy is at home? Or argue that the struggle against imperialism is not central to their liberation? The IBT’s position amounts to arguing from the heights of Wellington that the struggle to liberate the nation from imperialism, the root of oppression in the neocolonies, is nothing but a distraction!

IBT bankruptcy on Palestine

Nowhere is IBT’s method more obviously bankrupt than in Israel/Palestine. Today, there is an ongoing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza. In response, their recent “Stop the Gaza Genocide” article reiterates IBT’s support to the old ICL “interpenetrated peoples theory,” a “theory” which amounts to little more than a justification to not have a side with the oppressed nation against its oppressor, and deny permanent revolution in the region.

This “theory” argues that championing Palestinian liberation could only come at the expense of the democratic rights of the Israeli-Jewish nation, which would necessarily entail “reversing the terms of oppression” and outright national annihilation of the Jewish people. In its stead, the IBT calls for class struggle and revolution—but how are you going to have either when you don’t champion the fight for Palestinian liberation, the only basis on which you can break Israeli workers from Zionism and win over the Palestinian masses?

The IBT goes on further to lament how we renounced this “theory” in favour of our current position. They quote us saying how “‘the struggle for national liberation is not an obstacle to be moved to the side but a motor force for revolution’ as long as communists ‘take leadership of the national-liberation struggle.’” Actually this quote is right on the money. The ICL looks to treat the struggle for Palestinian liberation not as a distraction but a key part of socialist revolution in the region. What is necessary for that is communist leadership of this national liberation struggle.

So what about this quote does the IBT have a problem with? Does the IBT renounce that communists must fight for leadership of the national liberation struggle? Does the IBT see the struggle for Palestinian liberation as nothing more than an obstacle to be moved aside? For the IBT is the Palestinians’ resistance to their national extermination a mere distraction? Exemplifying this bankruptcy is their affirmation of the slogan “Not Jew against Arab, but class against class.” AKA don’t get distracted with the fight to free Palestine, focus on some “pure” class struggle instead!

Soon after October 7, the IBT released the leaflet “Down with Zionist Terror!” which argued that “The apartheid regime run by Tel Aviv is the inevitable result of the Zionist project to establish an ethno-religious state for Jews. Some 75 years ago this led to the violent expulsion of about 750,000 Palestinians and the confiscation of over 90 percent of their land. The current attack on Gaza is a direct

New ICL periodical!

Spartacist Letters
A Journal of Polemic and Exchange

No. 1, November 2024

Read online

icli.org/pubs/spart-letters/1

continuation of that unfinished campaign of ethnic cleansing.” Yes, correct. The Zionist state, established and codified in the 1948 war, was premised on the expulsion of the Palestinians. It is a settler colonial project predicated on the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people, which the genocide in Gaza is a continuation of.

So where did the Spartacist tradition lie on this question? Well the original position on the 1948 war, a position the SL took in 1968, was that in this war there was a side to take: *with Israel!* This was the war that led to the expulsion of entire cities of Palestinians and the establishment of the Zionist state within the “green lines,” and we justified it under the lie that the Israeli Jewish nation was threatened with extinction. The same 1968 article also called for a peace treaty on the 1949 boundary lines and equated the Zionist state with the Israeli Jewish nation.

In a later 1974 article, “Birth of a Zionist State,” which the IBT actively promotes today, the old SL changed their position to a dual defeatist one, arguing not that this was a bankrupt capitulation to Zionism, but that “new facts” were discovered that indicated the Jewish nation was not threatened. Since then, the old ICL maintained, as the IBT does today, that the borders that came from the 1948 war constitute a core part of Israel that must be defended if threatened. That is to say, the IBT still defends the settler colonial conquests of the 1948 war as legitimate, *which is the same line of the liberal Zionists!*

The updated defeatist line on the 1948 war while less egregious is still a gross capitulation to Zionism and imperialism. By having such a position, the IBT puts an equal sign between the Zionists who were looking to expropriate Palestine and the Arab nations that were fighting against it. Yes it is true that the Arab leaders would only betray the struggle for Palestinian freedom. But the task of communists was to intervene into this struggle against Zion-

ism and show how these corrupt regimes only undermined the fight for a free Palestine, including by fomenting anti-Jewish reaction which only rallied Jewish workers to the Zionist cause. Instead of this the IBT, like the historic SL, called to point the guns the other way in a conflict which was, in IBT’s own words, a “violent expulsion of about 750,000 Palestinians and the confiscation of over 90 percent of their land,” and which the current genocide in Gaza is a continuation of. I ask the IBT— which side are you on in the Nakba?

This is not a historical question of course, but has its implications in the ongoing war today. In contrast to the IBT’s approach of treating Palestinian liberation as a mere distraction, the ICL produced the article “A Revolutionary Road for Palestinian Liberation” which puts front and centre the question of national liberation. The entire basis of our intervention is centred around putting forward a strategy to defend Gaza, smash the Zionist state and defeat imperialism. We motivate the necessity of joint Jewish-Palestinian struggle not through moral preaching to love one’s neighbour and focus on class struggle, but by putting forward a counterposed strategy to free Palestine and to demonstrate that communists are the best fighters for Palestinian liberation, and that under Hamas there is only death and defeat.

Only by centring the question of Palestinian liberation are we actually able to motivate how Hamas’s approach of looking for mates with bourgeois nationalist rulers, while lumping Jewish workers in with the Zionist state, is in fact completely counterproductive to the struggle to liberate Palestine. In fact to destroy the Zionist state what needs to happen is to break it along class lines—which can only happen if Jewish workers can be won to the struggle for Palestinian freedom as their own. At the same time, we must convince Palestinians of the necessity of joint struggle, and to defend the national rights of Jewish

workers to live in Palestine—whose liberation also demands smashing of the Zionist state. Above all, it emphasises that joint class struggle in both Palestine and Israel *“must be connected to breaking the main obstacle standing in the way of any social progress: Israel’s oppression of Palestinians,”* which is the fundamental central question of the conflict.

The IBT, in their “Stop the Gaza Genocide!” article, clearly have a lot to complain about the ICL. To try and respond to our article they repeat their distortions on the anti-imperialist united front to imply that we see no reason to expose the bourgeois nationalists and believe that revolutionary leadership objectively springs from such tactics automatically. They lament how we centre the question of national liberation, *in Palestine!* What do they put forward in its place? Class struggle! As if class struggle is abstracted from the struggle for the national liberation of Palestine! This long and turgid article reads more like a wish list for joint class struggle and revolution rather than actually counterposing a strategy to Hamas. When they finally do try and motivate how to break Palestinian workers from Hamas it is almost comical:

“Thus Palestinian communists would not simply bloc militarily with Hamas but also advance transitional ‘economic’ demands (for example, during the protests against Hamas’s social austerity in July 2023).”

Gaza is being turned to rubble. There is an active genocide that threatens to destroy the Palestinian nation. Palestinians are not supporting Hamas because they think they have the best social welfare schemes. Palestinians are supporting Hamas because they think Hamas are the best fighters against Zionism and imperialism, because they believe Hamas is the best bet to free Palestine *from the river to the sea!* To imagine that the Palestinian people will break from Hamas because you are critical of their austerity reforms is not only economist but pathetic. The ICL puts front and

centre the struggle for communist leadership, with a program to expose Hamas for betraying the national liberation struggle. The IBT renounces this fight and in its place offers budget critiques. This is the fruit of separating class struggle from the struggle for Palestinian liberation.

In imperialist countries where the IBT does almost all of their work, it is clear that they are not looking to fight for communist leadership of the Palestinian movement either. In fact the speeches they have published on their website are pretty openly laudatory of elements of the pro-imperialist union bureaucracy: praising what they call “honourable unions” who advance “collective actions” for Palestine, which in their May Day article they make explicit including those “friends of Palestine” bureaucrats in Australia.

In truth, these “friends of Palestine,” most notably in the CFMEU and the MUA, are the main political roadblock to any real workers’ action for Palestine in this country, and have consistently opposed strike action and black bans due to their bloc with the open supporters of genocide in government. The SL/A’s work in the recent period has been primarily to expose the treacherous role of these bureaucrats. Meanwhile the IBT plays their left cover. In imperialist countries too, they betray the struggle for national liberation of the neocolonies.

I would like to end the presentation by quoting the Comintern’s Theses on the Eastern Question:

“Any refusal of Communists in the colonies to take part in the struggle against imperialist tyranny, on the excuse of supposed ‘defence’ of independent class interests, is opportunism of the worst sort that can only discredit the proletarian revolution in the East.”

This is true not just when there is a “military side” in the case of a war, but in peacetime as well. After all, war is politics by other means. This is the road the ICL has rejected. And this is the road the IBT is currently on. Thank you. ■

Union busters...

(continued from page 1)

sidesteps the one thing that is required—a confrontation with the ALP/ACTU tops and their rotten government. Even if realised the unions would still be tethered to the Labor tops, either organisationally or through the allegiance and program of their leaders. Key union leaders of this would-be federation, such as water boy Smith and MUA head Paddy Crumlin would remain as central cogs of the ALP machine. The other tops differ only by degree of separation, clinging on to their bureaucrat mates who in turn cling on to Albanese. Even worse is that unions with some of the most advanced workers would be divorced from the broader organised working class—leaving most unionists in the grip of their ACTU-aligned misleaders while weakening the ability of the workers movement to launch a class-wide struggle against the common enemy in Albanese. It is no surprise that with this paltry strategy the Canberra summit in December ended up a nothing burger, dangling promises of more the next time round.

The fortunes of the “lucky country” are more and more dim. With the world order that once promised it stability crumbling beneath its feet, the ruling class is increasingly forced to drive down working-class conditions and living standards just to maintain its deteriorating position. In this context, Albo’s attack on the CFMEU was a necessary move to prevent the working class from fighting to advance its conditions. This attack sent a clear message that there is no middle ground for any sort of balancing act between the interests of bosses and workers. Any union that steps

out of line will be targeted for repression and union busting. For the working class to defend itself and fight back, what is required is for it to emerge as an independent political force capable of struggling in its own interests against the Labor government. But that entails the workers movement breaking the chains that shackle it to the union tops’ Labor patrons and putting itself up against the core interests of the ruling class. Such a course demands a program that can take on the bosses’ rule and property, a program willing to *fight for power*.

For the left Laborite union leadership, that would entail a break with the very program that they have been raised on. Committed to an illusory cross-class “national interest,” their strategy has always come down to trying to elect a Labor government and pressure the ALP tops (and the bosses they serve) to hear them out. When faced with Albanese’s union busting these bureaucrats could do little more than bleat about “procedural fairness” and how “un-Australian” the attack was. For all the hot air, instead of a real fight to bury Labor, left Laborite “action” has amounted to harking back to bygone days when Labor’s administering for the ruling class didn’t demand such openly anti-worker measures. The result is the “left” union leaders trying to squirm and wriggle out of the bosses’ crosshairs (lest their union be given the CFMEU treatment) while placating their working-class base who have been looking for a fight. Left Laborism is not just insufficient, but a roadblock to advancing the workers movement.

As for the many workers angry at these union-busting moves, it is a natural first impulse to try to “reject” the ALP and the

ACTU. But it is simply material reality that these forces command the allegiance of the entire union leadership, left and right. There is no going around this misleadership, it is not something that can simply be “rejected” like one can reject a cigarette. Building a party that can actually bury Labor, a revolutionary party, requires driving a wedge between the working-class base and the current-day ALP and union tops. It requires not ignoring but exposing, confronting and removing these obstacles to advancing the workers movement.

A rank-and-file revolt in the unions and the ALP to purge these union busters from our ranks would be key to advancing this goal. While such a split would not be *our* split, and a “cleaned-up” ALP would not be *our* party, it would be a good thing if the workers movement ridded itself of these rightist elements. Such a fight would sep-

arate the wheat from the chaff, those who actually want to bury Labor from those who are all talk. And if these left Laborites were put in charge of the ALP and ACTU it would make it all the easier to put their program to the test and expose them as the central roadblock to the working class fighting the administration and more.

This task is not only possible, but has clear precedent in the history of the Australian labour movement. During WW1 when the rat Billy Hughes and other ALP tops championed conscription on behalf of the bosses, *they were driven out!* Albanese has made it clear that he believes anyone not completely kowtowing to the bosses has no place in the workers movement. It is only fair to return the favour and give him and his ilk the same treatment. *Chuck the bosses’ lackeys out of the ALP/ACTU!* ■

Contact us!

Spartacist League of Australia

iclfi.org/aus redbattler@exemail.com.au X@f RedBattlerSLA

— Local Directory —

Melbourne (National Office)

GPO Box 2339
Melbourne Vic 3001
(03) 9329 0275
spartacist-melb@exemail.com.au

Sydney

PO Box 244
Burwood NSW 1805
(02) 9281 2181
spartacist@exemail.com.au

International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist)

Box 7429 GPO, New York, NY 10116, USA | spartacist@spartacist.org | X@SpartacistICL

Down with the Trades Hall ban on TU4P!

Cops out of the workers movement!

The following article was published as a Red Battler supplement on 11 July.

In response to increased police repression against the pro-Palestine demos in Melbourne, the leadership of Trade Unionists for Palestine (TU4P) mooted a call to disaffiliate the police association from the Victorian Trades Hall Council (VTHC). The VTHC responded by locking TU4P out of Trades Hall—those turning up there for TU4P's 28 June public meeting found the doors bolted shut. This effective ban on their meeting was a clear message from the VTHC that if TU4P even raised opposing police affiliation to Trades Hall they would have to find venues elsewhere. This is an outrage! This attempt to silence defenders of Palestine must be defeated, and defeated now.

Today, despite continued popular support for Palestine, the Palestinian movement is at a standstill. Saddled with a program of impotent liberal outrage, the movement has been unable to effect any change to the Zionist onslaught on Gaza. The weekly protests are a rump of what they once were, campus encampments

have folded and activists are increasingly resorting to fruitless small-scale actions from graffitiing offices to "community pickets" of arms factories. The bourgeoisie smells blood and the movement is increasingly the target of state repression. "Outside agitators" are banned from universities and campus activists face disciplinary action with two ANU students already expelled. At the same time police harassment and intimidation of the Sunday Palestinian demos has escalated. It was in this context that, when someone graffitied "Cops out of Trades Hall" on the Trades Hall building, left Laborite VTHC secretary Luke Hilakari responded by grotesquely calling for police action declaring "...our relationship with the Victorian Police union has only got stronger over time. That won't change" (AAP).

Cops are not "workers in uniform" but armed defenders of capitalist exploitation and oppression. It is the police that bring batons down against picketing workers, Aboriginal people and Palestinian protesters alike. Kicking the cops and their "unions" out

of the Trades Hall, in fact out of the entire workers movement, is not only legitimate but necessary to defend and advance the Palestinian movement and workers movement as a whole. The VTHC's attempt to silence TU4P for even tabling such an elementary call is an open attack on the Palestinian movement.

While many unions have declared their support for Palestine, after nine months there has still yet to be a single instance of serious industrial action in defence of Palestine. Why is that? The answer is simple. The "Friends of Palestine" union officials are beholden to the Labor government which administers for the ruling class backing the genocide at the behest of American imperialism. Such unity with the open enemies of the working class is also highlighted by the union leadership's embrace of the police as part of the workers movement. Today this unity works to silence voices in support of Palestine.

The first step to get out of the current impasse is to break the bloc that prevents the unions from taking any real actions

for Palestine and which attempts to obstruct even the suggestion that the cops be kicked out of Trades Hall. A clear line must be drawn: are you on the side of Palestine or the police? This fight against censorship can and must be won. In 2004, leading up to a Spartacist League forum at Trades Hall, our room booking was cancelled at the behest of the police association because the meeting called for union defence of Aboriginal Redfern against cop terror. In response to this attempted ban, we waged a successful united-front campaign, gaining traction in the left and unions, winning our room back. This was a victory for Aboriginal people and the workers movement more broadly.

Today's ban is not just a suppression of TU4P but of the Palestinian movement as a whole. What is necessary to advance the Palestinian and workers movements is a united-front campaign of unionists, leftists and all defenders of Palestine to fight against this attack, which could be the start of a drive to expel the police from the VTHC and the labour movement more broadly. ■

Palestine...

(continued from page 20)

government continues to put the squeeze on workers, presiding over deteriorating living conditions and social decay. The working class delivering a serious blow to this hated government through a hard-fought strike to defend and advance its living conditions would do more to challenge Albanese and co than all the impotent weekly protests combined.

In turn, a successful strike against the government's backing of Israel would be a huge boon for the working class, strengthening its position and opening the door to further advance its interests. There is clear sentiment in the workers movement for actions in defence of Palestine, as attested to by the size of past demonstrations, as well as the number of motions passed and statements proclaimed in unions and Labor Party branches. However, to date, in spite of all the popular support, all the mass protests, all the motions, nothing has happened. No mass strikes against the government's support to genocide, no black bans on war matériel going to Israel, nothing. Why?

It is the same reason there has been no serious working-class struggle against this rotten government more generally: the entire union movement is shackled by a leadership subordinate to capitalism and beholden to the Labor Party administering on behalf of the ruling class, turning the screws on the oppressed at home while being slavishly loyal to its US big brother overseas. This union leadership includes the so-called "Friends of Palestine" bureaucrats who declare their support to Palestine but do nothing to mobilise their base to make this a fighting proposition. Such "Friends of Palestine" wax lyrical about international solidarity but at the end of the day kowtow to the pro-imperialist lackeys running the Labor government, refusing to chart an independent class-struggle road forward.

Instead of the head-on confrontation that is needed, the strategy of the "Friends of Palestine" amounts to begging and pleading for the capitalists and



RB photo

Spartacist-initiated anti-imperialist united front called to break US connection to defend Palestine.

their Labor government to change course on something that they are fully committed to. Spreading illusions that Australian capitalism can peacefully "opt out" of American diktats only weakens the working class and transforms sentiment for action into harmless Sunday speeches and empty motions. These union leaders are key in rendering the workers movement impotent and are the main roadblock to any serious class-struggle fight against the government's backing of Israel and its attacks on the working class alike.

As for the leaders of the Palestine protest movement and their left tails, they imbibe in the same worldview as these "left" bureaucrats. Instead of fighting for a class-struggle course they engage in liberal speechifying and small-time stunts, pushing appeals to the very imperialists who created and need Israel. This mirrors the futile strategy of their liberal co-thinkers in the union bureaucracy of begging the ruling class to change their mind. Their impotence leads to hysterical actions such as the protest against the Myer Christmas windows which attempted to "shame" families for simply celebrating Christmas, ultimately only serving to engender more repression and further alienate workers from the Palestinian cause. This liberal strategy has strangled the Palestinian movement.

To cover for their inability to effect change, protest leaders turn to their "Friends of Palestine" mates, with whom

they share a symbiotic relationship. By pointing to their union "friends in high places," and the myriad empty motions and solidarity statements that they peddle, they can claim that they are successful in their bid to slowly change the "hearts and minds" of Australians which will "pressure" the government to change tack. In turn, the union tops get a pat on the back and gain kudos for their "Friends of Palestine" pretensions without lifting a finger. Instead of fighting to break the working class from the labour bureaucracy, protest leaders have transformed the movement into a vehicle to promote it. Today, in their bid to rebuild the movement they have only doubled down on this course.

The Palestine movement will remain dead in the water unless it is tied to the same causes that have animated proletarian struggle throughout this country. Over the past period, workers from construction and maritime, to Sydney trains and Woolworths warehouses, have been sparked into action against anti-union attacks and their deteriorating living conditions under Albanese's Labor. Activists must look to turn each expression of proletarian unrest into a fight that can strike a blow against the bosses' machinations against Australian workers and Palestinians alike. This, in turn, necessitates a ruthless struggle to expose the role of the "left" union traitors in crippling both the Palestinian and workers movements. A line must be drawn in the workers move-

ment against all supporters of the Albanese government as well as their left-talking conciliators in the unions. Only this offers a road forwards to bring the Labor government and its support to Israel to heel.

Left cover for "Friends of Palestine"

Instead, the left has remained wedded to the movement's existing course. A prime example is TU4P, which was set up by left groups and is the vehicle through which much of their work around Palestine has been carried out. For all the differences between participating groups and individuals, they have been united on the basis of "rank-and-file activism," not as opponents of the "Friends of Palestine" bureaucrats but as their *promoters*. An early example of this was the TU4P-initiated "community picket" against Israeli ZIM ships at Melbourne's Webb Dock in January. While activists bravely stared down police repression, these "community pickets" only temporarily stalled a couple of Israeli ships with no effect on continued support to the Zionist war machine while acting as a cover for the maritime union (MUA) bureaucrats' refusal to black ban war matériel to Israel (see "To defend Palestine: Break the U.S. connection in the workers movement," *RB* No. 1, Autumn 2024).

In this sense, TU4P, like the left more broadly, embodies the very problem that has plagued the Palestine movement and, as a result, has suffered the same fate. Today, it has splintered and is a rump of what it once was. For all the debates and frustrations within TU4P, most prominently seen between Socialist Alternative (SAIt) and Solidarity, none of the major participants have broken from their fealty to the left Laborite union bureaucracy.

Take for instance one of the main debates that has raged within TU4P: what approach to take towards the ALP. Some, such as Solidarity, have been much more eager to maintain good relations with Labor and the union tops in order to pressure them. Others, like SAIt, who channel the petty-bourgeois moral outrage of the movement, denounce Labor from top to bottom. The toiling masses of Australia

Trump...

(continued from page 20)

power, it could afford the luxury of liberal democracy at home and abroad. Now that the pressure is increasing on all fronts, liberalism is an unnecessary hindrance to U.S. global dominance. There was always a mailed fist under the velvet glove. But now the glove is too expensive and it's coming off.

Before the U.S. elections, liberals were already ditching their own "values" as fast as they possibly could. Open borders, international law, trans rights, multiculturalism, anti-racism—finished are the days when the ruling class itself proclaimed to stand for these high principles. Finished are the days of Trudeau, Jacinda Ardern and Obama. Now Sir Keir Starmer is what passes for left-wing in ruling circles.

Is the situation hopeless? For those who place their faith in the enlightenment

of the progressive elites, the situation is indeed hopeless. All they can do is curse the masses for being backward as they themselves prepare to kowtow to reaction. But it is precisely among the working masses, including the millions who supported Trump, that hope is to be found.

Defeating the liberals is the worst thing that can happen to the forces of populist reaction. Now they will have to navigate the impossible currents of a collapsing world order themselves. It is one thing to channel the deep popular anger at the elite. It is another to solve the underlying cause of this anger. Trump and his international co-thinkers will have no choice but to repress and grind down the working class of the world; eventually, the masses will turn against them. In which direction will this energy be channeled? This is the great question of our time.

A little over 30 years ago, communism was proclaimed dead and the triumph of liberal democracy over the Soviet Union

was heralded as the "end of history." Today everyone knows that history hasn't ended. Almost everyone knows, or feels, that liberal democracy is utterly bankrupt. As for communism, it isn't dead, but nor is it quite alive. Splintered, sclerotic and isolated from the working class, communists have a steep slope to climb. As a new period of reaction opens, it is our task to make up the lost time and prepare the working class for the struggles to come.

If the forces of the revolutionary left continue to clutch in vain to the coattails of liberals, they will continue to alienate the working class and be an irrelevant factor. The greatest danger in the coming period is for the left to wait in expectation for the liberals to lead the "resistance." Equally bankrupt will be the impulse of some to separate themselves from the masses and seek refuge in abstract phrase-mongering about revolution. Both these trends have been dominant these past decades. Both must be discarded.

The only way Marxists can become a living factor is if they draw the appropriate lessons from the last 30 years of failure and offer a path forward for the working class, in a complete rupture with both liberalism and right-wing populism.

In the immediate period, defensive struggles will no doubt be on the order of the day. As the liberals abandon the oppressed groups they claimed to champion—black people, Muslims, trans people, immigrants, women—communists must be in the vanguard of their struggles. But they must seek to build these movements on stronger foundations, away from the moralism and sentimentalism of the liberals and intricately linked to the material interests of all workers. Ultimately, the working class will be the deciding factor. To win its allegiance, communists must show, through the course of class struggle, that unlike the traitors leading them today, they have a program that can materially advance its interests and lead to its liberation. ■

and the world do indeed have every reason to hate Albanese's Labor! But what is needed is not empty vitriol against Labor as some monolithic enemy, but a program to break the workers movement from the chains of the Labor government and their conciliators in the trade-union bureaucracy. For all the huffing and puffing, neither side of the debate does this. Rather, they *converge* over support to the "Friends of Palestine" bureaucrats. This was on full display at the small TU4P rally in defence of Palestine outside the Victorian ALP conference in May.

The conference, attended by hundreds of union delegates, was occurring at a time of rising unrest within the union movement and in the ALP itself over the Labor government's continued support to the genocide. This was an opportunity to connect the shrinking weekly Sunday protests to the workers movement and exacerbate the fissures that Albanese was trying so hard to contain to avoid a "Gaza split." With dissatisfaction in the workers movement threatening to break to the surface at the conference, Albanese demanded of his Victorian counterparts that any potential split get sorted pronto. What was required was to heighten these tensions, drive through the feared "Gaza split" and throw a wrench in the plans of Albanese and those who refuse to break with him. This is the perspective that the SL/A fought for. As our banner outside the conference declared: "Defend Palestine! Chuck the U.S. Lackeys Out of the ALP/ACTU!"

Instead of this perspective, TU4P and the reformist left moulded the protest into a vehicle to promote the "Friends of Palestine" union bureaucrats and express moral outrage. While Solidarity's attempts to cosy up to ALP delegates were sabotaged by SAlt's blanket denunciations of Labor as they heckled and jostled attendees, for all the bristling tension, they both championed then-head of the CFMEU, Christy Cain, who spruiked from the platform how he was fighting the good fight. They willfully ignored the fact that he hadn't lifted a finger to mobilise the powerful union he led to give the ruling class the gut punch it needs. Emblematic of their impotence was the "finale" of the Saturday rally which saw protesters storm the conference in what amounted to little more than a publicity stunt aimed at "shaming Labor." In part as a result of the demonstration's impotence, the Labor tops had an easy road patching up any potential "Gaza split," allowing the "Socialist Left" inside the conference to push through motions proclaiming support to Palestine—enough to appease critics within Labor and the unions but with no effect on the federal party as it continued to back Israel without hindrance.

TU4P's subservience to the union bureaucracy was further exemplified

after their 28 June meeting was banned from Trades Hall. The ban by the Victorian Trades Hall Council (VTHC) was in response to a mooted call by TU4P's Coordinating Committee (CC) that the Police Association be disaffiliated from Trades Hall following heavy police repression against Palestine protests. *In a bloc with the police, it was the very bureaucrats that TU4P was formed to promote that brought down the hammer on them!* This provoked a bitter wrangle within TU4P over the CC. On one side, the Solidarity-led bloc fought to dissolve the CC, condemning it for having poisoned relations with Trades Hall. On the other side, the SAlt-led bloc fought to defend the CC. But their shared subservience to the union bureaucracy ensured that when faced with such a belligerent attack by the VTHC union tops, both sides sought to *bury* the Trades Hall ban. None dared to publicise it, some even tried to pretend there was no ban at all!

This was the context of our intervention to defend TU4P against the VTHC and to chuck the cops out of the workers movement (see box, previous page). The fact is, the same bureaucrats that prevent the unions from taking any action in defence of Palestine are the ones that banned TU4P for merely suggesting that the cops be kicked out of Trades Hall. We drew a line: are you on the side of Palestine or the police? In doing so, there was no burying the ban behind the CC wrangle. It motivated others to push forward with a motion at the large TU4P public meeting in July that included the call to end the police affiliation to VTHC.

When it came to voting for this motion, some, including Solidarity, outrageously voted against it while others, including SAlt, supported it. The motion passed—*good!* However, no sooner had it passed than it was buried. Having a motion pass is one thing, but to put it into effect would put TU4P up against the "Friends of Palestine" officials they promote. It would mean breaking from the very framework that TU4P was founded on and guided by. Kevin Bracken, the former head of the Victorian branch of the MUA, captured the perfidious role played by TU4P declaring, as one *Red Battler* supporter reported, that "If you want to organise to get the police out of Trades Hall go form your own group. That is not what TU4P was set up to do." Since the vote on that motion *nothing* has been done by TU4P to drive the cops out of Trades Hall or even to defend themselves! To this day the ban persists. The result of this act of *seppuku* was predictable. Today, TU4P is a shell of what it once was.

A path forwards

What was clearly posed for TU4P to defend itself is what is posed for the Pal-

estine movement as a whole: the necessity to break from the liberal leadership and its subordination to the trade-union bureaucracy. For the movement to rise from its collapsed state, it needs to be rebuilt on the solid foundation of *class struggle*. The working class has continued to raise its head in the face of declining living conditions. It has been propelled into action against the same force that has ensured Australia continues to support the Zionist regime—the Albanese government and the bosses he bats for. Pro-Palestine activists must break from their program of liberal moralising and small-time stunts and fight for the working class to wield its immense social power and *strike a blow* against the common enemy. If successful, this could terminally weaken the Labor government and threaten the ruling class's ability to support Israel. What is required for this is a *determined struggle* to break the workers movement from today's union "leaders"—most especially the left-talking false "Friends of Palestine." Those who crawl to these bureaucrats only help to chain the Palestinian and workers movements to the very roadblock that has crippled the class-struggle fight necessary to advance the interests of both Palestinians and the proletariat here.

The past few months has seen the Labor government continue in its attempts

Monarchy...

(continued from page 5)

need for revolution but by putting a concrete path forwards in the struggles today, against the doomed strategy of today's misleadership. This is exactly what we Spartacists have been fighting for from the fight against AUKUS to opposition to the Zionist terror in Palestine to the struggle in defence of the CFMEU.

But for the RCO, they assign this task to some imagined future where the Communist Party is magically reforged. In the meantime the RCO abstractly preaches to workers of the need for communism. In fact, when push comes to shove the RCO bows before Labor. In the upcoming Queensland election *they actively call to vote for Labor and the Greens* excusing such a call with the lame reason that Queensland Labor has offered some cynical bribes while they continue to wage war on workers and the oppressed. The federal and Queensland Labor parties have drawn a line against the working class—batting for the bosses with AUKUS, Israel and now through union busting. Instead of fighting for a working-class alternative in the elections, sowing the seeds from which

a revolutionary party can sprout, the RCO instead throw their lot behind Labor and the Greens in a bid to defeat the LNP and "keep the right out of power." That is, building the very forces whose government has openly betrayed the working class and are thus paving the way for Dutton and his Coalition. It is a very good thing that the RCO has fought for this demonstration today against the monarchy, but abolishing the monarchy will never be accomplished attached to Albanese nor his posse nationally and in Queensland.

To summarise: A leadership too spineless to take on the monarchy will never be able to confront, let alone overthrow the ruling class. And the only way you're going to get such a leadership is not by tailing their failing strategy, neither is it by abstractly preaching for communism from the sidelines. To fight for a republic and revolutionary workers movement alike, what is needed is a ruthless struggle to break the working class from today's traitorous leadership. This requires nothing less than combating head-on the social-chauvinists, the King-kissers and all who conciliate with them. With that, we in the Spartacists say once more: *Abolish the monarchy! Forward to a workers republic!* ■

Trump's comeback: THE DEATH OF LIBERALISM

The following article by G. Perrault was published as a Spartacist supplement on 7 November.

Donald Trump's second election as U.S. president marks the death blow of the liberal post-Soviet order. The American empire is not defeated, and liberalism is not finished as a political force. But liberalism is dead as the dominant ideology of the western imperialist ruling classes.

2024 is not 2016. Back then, Trump's election was seen as an aberration. It provoked a frenetic reaction from liberals, who doubled down in defense of the status quo and the progressive values it supposedly stood for. In 2020, Biden defeated Trump and populist forces around the world suffered setbacks in the wake of the Covid pandemic. These developments were greeted with a collective sigh of relief in Washington, London, Brussels, Berlin and Tokyo: "Trump, populism, Covid, this was all just a bad dream."

But it wasn't. From Afghanistan, Ukraine and Palestine to the domestic situation in the U.S. itself, the Biden presidency oversaw the continued collapse of the liberal status quo. The very party supposed to embody global enlightenment oversaw the

No more kneeling for BLM, crying liberal prime ministers, and token Indigenous reforms.



Yuri Gripas/ABACAPRESS.COM



The Canadian Press/Alamy Live News



Bill Blair/JM/Getty Images

genocide in Gaza, the greatest crime in generations. While an air of fatuous optimism hung around Biden and his administration, militarily, economically and politically the ground was eroding from under their feet.

As a result, in all Western imperialist countries the forces of right-wing reaction are ascendant. Yesterday's triumphant lib-

erals are being thrown out one after the other. Kamala Mania—the hope that a non-senile person could keep the status quo going just a little longer—represented the last burst of energy of agonizing liberalism. It was as deluded as it was short-lived. Trump's victory on November 5 both symbolizes and confirms the defeat of the liberal wing of the imperialist

establishment.

This is not a fluke. The shift away from liberalism has much deeper causes than Donald Trump, social media and disinformation. At bottom this ideological shift in the American ruling class is a reflection of U.S. hegemony slipping away. When the U.S. stood as the uncontested world
continued on page 19

Palestine movement impasse: Where to now?

The 19 January ceasefire between Israel and Hamas marks more than a year of heroic Palestinian resistance to the relentless, brutal Zionist assault on Gaza. Palestinians have every right to celebrate their successes, as they have done. However, while failing in its stated aim of eliminating Hamas, Israel has advanced its historic objective to expand its borders, stepping up its offensive in the West Bank and leaving Gaza in ruins. It is clear that Palestinian oppression is far from over. In Australia, as elsewhere, pro-Palestinian activists must use this reprieve to regroup, draw real lessons and prepare for the next stage of the conflict. The Zionist onslaught propelled thousands in this country onto the streets. Despite this, and a plethora of union motions and solidarity statements, the Palestine movement has been unable to effect any change in Australia's support to Israel. Instead, it has become moribund, with weekly protests shrivelling while the remnants have increasingly fractured. Taking advantage of this, Albanese and various state governments have upped the ante against activists, meting out increased state repression (see defence statement, page 2).

How did we get here? As we wrote in *RB* No. 1 (Autumn 2024), the imperialist ruling classes have a material interest in maintaining Israel as a crucial outpost, one whose basis is the denial of Palestinian national existence. The US pours billions of dollars a year into Israel to maintain it as a key base to project US power

in a volatile region. It is a vital component of the US-led world order, something that the US clings ever tighter to as its hegemony declines.

For Australian imperialism, backing the US-led world order is integral to its interests. The ruling class's existence has long depended on playing junior partner to its

American big brother. With US hegemony slipping, the Australian ruling class has desperately sought to prop it up. This is the context of Australia's ironclad backing of Israel. Australia is not going to end its support to the Zionist machine unless pressure is brought to bear on this junior link in the imperialist chain. What is required is to *strike a real blow* against the Australian ruling class. The only force with the social power capable of carrying this out, through withdrawing labour and stopping production, is the working class. It is the working class that holds the cards in breaking Australia's support to Israel. For the pro-Palestine movement to succeed it *must* tie itself to struggles of the working class and fight to unleash this social power.

There is every reason for these two struggles to be fused. For one, it is in the objective interests of the Australian working class to fight for a free Palestine. *All* imperialist machinations to uphold the dying US-led world order, from Palestine to China, have been and will be paid for by the proletariat and oppressed. Working-class anger at Albanese has been percolating as the
continued on page 18

Melbourne, 11 September: Riot cops attack pro-Palestine protesters at Land Forces arms expo.

